

MARCH

THE

10 CTS.

ARGOSY



BOOK-LENGTH
NOVEL COMPLETE

Four Speeds
for Forest Hill
by George M.A. Cain



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Camden, N. J., U. S. A.

Berliner Gramophone Co., Montreal
Canadian Distributors

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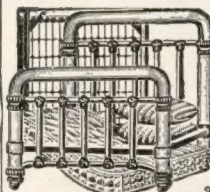
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Seamless Brussels Rug



No. MK177. Magnificent extra heavy seamless Brussels rug in two sizes, selected yarns—very attractive semi-oriental design. Looks well in any room. Colorings Tan, Red, Green and Brown harmoniously blended. A real bargain. Size 8 ft. 3 in. x 10 ft. 6 in. Price. **\$12.74**
\$1.00 Per Month
 Size 9 x 12 feet
 Price.....**\$13.96**
\$1.00 Per Month

5-Piece, 2-Inch Post Steel Bed Outfit Bargain



No. MK148. Elegant 2-inch continuous post steel bed, 4-in. fillers in artistic design, height head end 52 in.; link fabric steel frame springs, cotton topmattress and two 4½ lb. hen feather pillows 18 x 25 in. All sizes, 3 ft., 3 ft. 6 in.; 4 ft., or 4 ft. 6 in., full size. Colors, White, For Green or Vernis Martin. A remarkable bargain at our low price of only **\$9.98**
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Oak Rocker

No. MK185. Solid oak; genuine quartered oak arms; golden finish. Front posts, front and top rails and side wings richly carved. Seat and back upholstered with brown imitation Spanish leather. Wood fibre and moss filling. Seat 19½ x 19 in. 6 spiral springs. Strong runners, heavy posts. 38 in. high. Price **\$3.97**.



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No. MK181. Golden oak or fumed finish. Large 44 inch top, extends to 6 ft. 14 in. rim, heavy octagon pedestal fitted to 24 inch platform which rests upon 4 Colonial scroll legs. Excellently finished throughout. This is an elegant Dining Table, one that will grace any dining room. A real bargain at Hartman's remarkably low price. **\$11.95**
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Dresser Bargain

No. MK180. Top of base 40x19 inches. French bevel plate mirror 24x20 inches, is supported by strong standards. Top of mirror frame has neat carving. 2 small extended drawers at top of base, two full length drawers below. A real bargain at our remarkably low price of only.....**\$9.68**
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No. MK105. Tub is 8 shirt capacity, of Louisiana cypress, corrugated on inside for effective rubbing surface. Finished in natural color and bound by 3 steel hoops. 4-pronged, 10-in. cypress dasher block, cannot slip or crack. Gearing is durable; roller bearings. Very easy to run. Tub is supported by 3 legs bolted into iron sockets. Does not tear clothes. Price **\$4.50**
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No. MK184. Choice quality solid oak, fumed finish. Table top 36x24 in., 2 roomy book ends, 7 in. connecting shelf. Panels at sides of book ends match panels on chairs. Chairs have 2-in. front posts fitted to genuine quarter-sawn oak arms, 3½ in. wide. Seats and backs upholstered with imitation Spanish leather. Heavy steel springs. Complete set.....**\$12.65**

"Wonder" Vacuum Sweeper

No. MK182. Noiseless fibre bearings and bel- lows lifting rods, steel frame dust bag, wide opening dust pan, pressed steel top, 4 drive wheels on brush, 3 bellows and 12 in. nozzle. Nickel-plated. Fully guaranteed. Price **\$3.97**
50c Per Month



THE ARGOSY

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A Mystery of Roscoe Conkling Park

By Seward W. Hopkins

Author of "Too Terrible for War"

will be the Book - Length Novel to be published complete in the April Argosy. It is a vivid tale of theft and disappearance in Utica, and cannot fail to enchain the reader's interest from the moment the goddess alights from the street - car in the opening paragraph.

Do You Care For Money?

Then begin the new Two-Part story starting in the April Argosy

The Heir to Three Millions

By Joseph Ivers Lawrence

Do You Go to the Movies?

In that case you will surely enjoy a capital short story in the April Argosy

The Smuggler's Daughter — Five Reels

By Perley Poore Sheehan

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 8 West Fortieth Street, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London
FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, \$1.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; \$1.50 to Canada, and \$2.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

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Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in The Munsey Magazines

	Line Rate	Special Combination Line Rate
Munsey's Magazine	\$2.00	
The Argosy	1.30	\$4.49
Railroad Man's Magazine	.80	
All-Story Weekly	.60	Less 3% cash discount.
	\$4.70	

April Argosy Forms Close February 17th.

"A New Force In Business" is a booklet that tells how to advertise successfully in the Classified Department of the Munsey Magazines. Mailed anywhere on request.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

EVERY HOUSEHOLD ON FARM IN SMALL TOWN OR SUBURBS, where oil lamps are used, needs and will buy the wonderful Aladdin Mantle Lamp; burns common coal oil (kerosene); gives a light five times as bright as electric. Awarded Gold Medal at San Francisco Exposition. One farmer cleared over \$500.00 in six weeks; hundreds with rigs earning \$100.00 to \$300.00 per month. No cash required. We furnish capital to reliable men. Write quick for wholesale prices, territory and sample lamp for free trial. Address nearest office, Mantle Lamp Co., 502 Aladdin Building, Chicago, Ill. Mantle Lamp Co., 502 Thermos Building, New York City.

\$50.00 A WEEK UP. ALL THE FREE CLOTHES YOU WANT TO WEAR simply to advertise us. Write today for self-measuring blanks, style chart, big book of samples, etc. Send no money. A postal card brings all. We pay expressage on everything. American Woolen Mills Co., Dept. 302, Chicago.

FREE SAMPLE—NOSPLASH WATER STRAINERS SELL THEMSELVES. No talking—experience unnecessary. Daily profits \$5 upwards. Send 2c (mailing cost). L. K. D. Union Filter Co., New York.

AGENTS—MAKE A BIG "CLEAN UP" SELLING OUR HOUSEHOLD SPECIALS. Quick sales. \$25-\$75 weekly a cinch. Write for colored circulars and immediate appointment. E. M. Davis, President, K22 Davis Building, Chicago.

AGENTS: GET AN EASY SELLER. SANITARY ALL METAL Bread and Pastry Board and Rolling Pin is making big hit. Make \$25 to \$40 every week. Smith, Ohio, sold thirty-eight one day. Profit \$19.00. Sells at sight. No talking necessary. Free sample to agents. Write quick for appointment and territory. Union Manufacturing Company, 161 Main Street, Cambridge, Ohio.

LIVE MEN CAN MAKE \$25.00 TO \$40.00 WEEKLY selling my actually "made-to-order" men's suits at \$12.50 to \$25.00. No truck, no faking, no forcing a man to keep a garment that is not satisfactory. You can build up a future business for yourself, prove up your ability, make good. Then I will help you to own a store all your own. Try me on one suit for yourself. Then you or some friend will want to be my agent. Meet me face to face. Tom Murray, 411 So. Sangamon Street, Chicago.

AGENTS WANTED.—AGENTS MAKE 500 PER CENT PROFIT selling "Novelty Sign Cards." Merchants buy 10 to 100 on sight. 800 varieties. Catalogue Free. Sullivan Co., 1233 W. Van Buren Street, Chicago, Ill.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS. Furnishing Everything: men and women, \$50.00 to \$200.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories," home or small room anywhere. No canvassing. Opportunity lifetime. Booklet free. Ragsdale Co., Drawer 92, East Orange, N. J.

MAN OR WOMAN OF GOOD CHARACTER IN EACH TOWN to distribute free goods as advertising. Experience unnecessary. References required. \$15 a week for liberal offer to agents. Hudson King & Co., 5 South Clinton Street, Chicago.

AGENTS WANTED.—WE WANT ONE GOOD LIVE Hustler in every town to represent the oldest and largest Cash Tailoring House in the World. Make \$10.00 a day during spare time, taking orders for our celebrated made to measure clothes. Pants cut in latest style and made to individual measure, \$2.75 postage paid. No capital needed—no experience necessary—your own clothes at wholesale prices—liberal cash profits—special inducements for good men. Write quick before your territory is snapped up. The Progress Tailoring Co., Dept. 73, Chicago.

AGENTS—500% PROFIT. Free Sample Gold and Silver Sign Letters for store fronts and office windows. Anyone can put on. Big demand everywhere. Write today for liberal offer to agents. Metallic Letter Co., 409 N. Clark, Chicago, U. S. A.

AGENTS—STEADY INCOME.—LARGE MANUFACTURER of Handkerchiefs and Dress Goods, etc. wishes representative in each locality. Factory to consumer. Big profits, honest goods. Whole or spare time. Credit given. Send for particulars. Freepost Mfg. Co., 38 Main Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Armstrong Earned \$67.50 1st Day selling our new business necessity. Retail \$5.00 to \$30.00. Agents profit 150%. Buyer satisfied or money back. No competition. Exclusive territory. Free sample. Sayers Co., 412 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

WANTED—RELIABLE MEN AND WOMEN to place our EGGINE in stores and appoint sub-agents. Takes the place of eggs in baking and cooking at less than 9c a dozen. Chas. Morrissey Co., A. 4419-25 Madison St., Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

MAKE \$21 NEXT SATURDAY. BRAND NEW PROPOSITION, patented last January. Amazing invention, compressed air washing machine weighs but two pounds; excels work of high-priced machines. Customers excited; agents coinng money. A sale at every house. Price only \$1.50; 200% profit. Cleans tub of clothes in three minutes; works like magic. F. Hughes made \$21 first eight hours. No charge for territory. Investigate. Write now. Wendell Co., 1003 Oak St., Lelpsic, Ohio.

YOUNG MAN. Would You Accept A Tailor-Made Suit just for showing it to your friends? If you live in a town smaller than 10,000, write Banner Tailoring Co., Dept. 232, Chicago, and get beautiful samples, styles and a wonderful offer.

BIG TEXTILE MILLS want ambitious men and women everywhere to show latest dress fabrics, neckwear, hosiery and underwear. 400 styles. Easy sales. Values beat stores. Many making over \$30.00 weekly. All or spare time. Complete sample outfit starts you. Steadfast Mills, 78 Remsen St., Cohoes, N. Y.

1916'S SENSATION! 11 PIECE TOILET SET selling like wildfire at \$1. with \$1 Carving Set Free! Enormous profits! Tremendous hit! Engle made \$51 first week. Write quick! Pierce Co., Dept. B, Chicago.

AGENTS MAKE BIG MONEY. The best line of food flavors, perfumes, soaps and toilet preparations etc., ever offered. Over 250 light weight, popular priced, quick selling necessities—in big demand—well advertised—easy sellers—big repeaters—100% profit. Complete outfits furnished free to workers. Just a postal today. American Products Co., 3221 American Building, Cincinnati, Ohio.

TAILORING SALESMEN WANTED.—WE WANT A GOOD MAN in your town. We have the best money-maker on the market. A new and different plan. A most liberal offer. We start you with a large complete sample equipment which lands the orders every time. Only one agent in each town. We teach you the business and help you land orders. Not one penny needed. Everything free. Your spare time is all we want. Write today. Spencer Mead Co., Dept. 68, Chicago.

WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY.—START AS OUR AGENT. become manufacturer. Everyday necessities. Fastest repeat sellers. Marvellous profits. Proposition worth at least \$40 weekly. Samples free. Fredk. Lobl Manufacturing Company, 536 Warren Street, Boston, Mass.

WHY WASTE YEARS in acquiring by experience training which you can secure through our Personal Service Course in Practical Salesmanship in a few months? Information free. The J. P. Eliam Sales Service, Dept. A, 130 N. Fifth Ave., Chicago.

AGENTS—400 SNAPPY ALUMINUM SPECIALTIES AND UTENSILS. means a sale in every home. General Sales Course Free. \$50.00 a week sure. Answer quick. American Aluminum Mfg. Co., Division S-46, Lemont, Ill.

AGENTS—RAINCOAT SPECIAL. UMBRELLA FREE. Wonderful seller. Big money maker. Sample free to wear while demonstrating. State size. Guaranteed Raincoat Co., 907 North Street, Dayton, Ohio.

RELIABLE MAN. 18 TO 60. WANTED IN Each Locality to represent big sick and accident insurance company with amazing, startling, sensational new selling plan. Apply quick to W. G. Critchlow, Department 2712, Covington, Kentucky.

\$15.00 MADE FIRST DAY BY 13 YEAR OLD BOY WITH SHOMESCOPE. Woman made \$6.00 first hour. Others doing as well. Particulars free. Shomescope Mfg. Co., 539 West 13th Street, Kansas City, Mo.

SALESMAN—AUTOMOBILE TIRES AND ACCESSORIES. \$100 per month and advance expenses to right man. Desk 800, S. E. Co., 5025-35 So. Wabash Avenue, Chicago.

SWELL SUIT FREE FOR 2 HOURS' WORK. Show it to your friends and make \$5.00 an hour in your spare time. We show how. Costs nothing to try. Write quick for measure blank and our handy sample outfit. All Free. We deliver everything free. Look into this. Paragon Tailoring Co., Dept. 302, Chicago.

FAST SELLING "KANTLEAK" RAINCOAT Proposition. Cooper earned \$60 in 5 days. Bridge \$88 in 6 days. We deliver and collect. New 1916 swatches free. Write today. Comer Mfg. Co., 102 Owen Street, Dayton, Ohio.

WANTED. DISTRIBUTORS. MEN AND WOMEN to distribute Ko-Ko-Foam with Free Borax Soap Powder. No money or experience needed. Good pay. R. Ward & Co., 750 N. Franklin Street, Chicago.

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PATENTS—WRITE FOR HOW TO OBTAIN A PATENT. List of Patent Buyers, and Inventions Wanted, \$1,000,000 in prizes offered for inventions. Send Sketch for free opinion as to patentability. Our Four Books sent free upon request. Patents advertised Free. We assist inventors to sell their inventions. Victor J. Evans Co., Patent Attys., 756 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

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PATENTS—TRADE-MARKS. SEND FOR MY FREE BOOK "How to Get Them." It's full of information you should know. Joshua R. H. Potts, S. S. Dearborn St., Chicago; 929 Chestnut St., Philadelphia; 805 G St., Washington.

PATENTS SECURED THROUGH CREDIT SYSTEM. Free search. Send sketch. Book and advice Free. Waters & Co., 4294 Warder Building, Washington, D. C.

IDEAS WANTED—Manufacturers are writing for patents procured through me. Three books with list hundreds of inventions wanted sent free. I help you market your invention. Advice Free. R. B. Owen, 68 Owen Bldg., Washington, D. C.

GAMES AND ENTERTAINMENTS

PLAYS, VAUDEVILLE SKETCHES, Monologues, Dialogues, Speakers, Minstrel Material, Jokes, Recitations, Tableaux, Drills, Entertainments, Make-Up Goods. Large Catalog Free. T. S. Denison & Co., Dept. 43, Chicago.

CACHOO (Joke Sneez Powder) 10c; 18 for \$1; Chicken Inspector Badge 10c; 30 varieties Fine Jute Wigs at 75c each; Mustaches 35c; Full Beards 75c, \$1.25, \$2.50; Negro Wig 50c; Box Grease Paints 35c. Cat. Free. Percy Ewing, Decatur, Ill.

SHEET MUSIC

"ROSE OF MY LOVE," AND "GATES OF GOLD," best songs of the year. 60 cent music. Send 10 cents, stamps or coin, for both songs, to introduce. Address Red Letter Press, 630 Orchestra Building, Chicago.

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WILL PAY \$5.00 TO \$50.00 FOR LARGE CENT dated 1799. We pay cash premiums on all large cents, eagle cents, etc., and all rare coins to 1912. Thousands of coins and bills wanted. Send 4c for our Large Illustrated Coin Circular. May mean large profits to you. Numismatic Bank, Dept. M, Fort Worth, Tex.

\$4.25 PAID FOR FLYING EAGLE CENTS dated 1856. We pay a cash premium on hundreds of old coins. Send 10c at once for New Illustrated Coin Value Book, 4x7. It may mean your fortune. Clarke & Co., Coin Dealers, Box 101, Le Roy, N. Y.

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BUILD A \$5,000 BUSINESS IN TWO YEARS. LET US START YOU in the collection business. No capital needed; big field. We teach secrets of collecting money; refer business to you. Write today for Free Pointers and new plan. American Collection Service, 11 State Street, Detroit, Mich.

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FIRST-CLASS SOLE AGENCY FOR SWEDEN, eventually whole Scandinavia, wanted in the latest news of mass and consumption articles. Please communicate with Celsar Lindström, Malmö, Sweden.

MISCELLANEOUS

THE ETERNAL QUESTION—"WHAT AM I TO DO?" Helpful knowledge gained by consulting Astrology. Trial reading for 10c. Give birthdate. L. Thomson, Dept. 70, Kansas City, Mo.

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DO YOU WANT A POSITION FOR LIFE WITH BIG PAY, SHORT HOURS and Sure Advancement? Then work for Uncle Sam. My free illustrated book DK 13 tells how to get an appointment. Earl Hopkins, Washington, D. C.

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MAKE BIG MONEY LAYING TILE. We teach you how in one lesson and sell you tile at wholesale so you can go right out and close contracts. Attractive work. Ceramic Co., 118 N. La Salle Street, Chicago.

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AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

TYPEWRITING OF MANUSCRIPTS accurately and expeditiously executed by Jos. C. Kopins, 34 Nevins Street, Brooklyn, New York.

WANTED—SHORT STORIES, ARTICLES, POEMS, ETC. We pay on acceptance. Send prepaid with return postage if unavailable. Handwritten MSS. acceptable. Cosmos Magazine, 115 Stewart Building, Washington, D. C.

REAL ESTATE—FARM LANDS

MISSISSIPPI

IS HE CRAZY? The owner of a plantation in Mississippi is giving away a few five-acre tracts. The only condition is that figs be planted. The owner wants enough figs raised to supply a Canning Factory. You can secure five acres and an interest in the factory by writing Eubank Farms Company, 783 Keystone, Pittsburgh, Pa. They will plant and care for your trees for \$6 per month. Your profit should be \$1,000 per year. Some think this man is crazy for giving away such valuable land, but there may be method in his madness.

POULTRY

WRITE YOUR NAME ON A POSTAL FOR OUR NEW 1916 Incubator Book. Tells why Prairie State Incubators "Hatch Most Chicks That Live." Contains chapter on hatching, rearing, and Poultry Diseases. Describes famous Prairie State Hatching and Rearing Equipment. Prairie State Incubator Co., 301 Main Street, Homer City, Pa.

POULTRY PAPER, 44-124 PAGE PERIODICAL. up to date, tells all you want to know about care and management of poultry for pleasure or profit. Four months for 10 cents. Poultry Advocate, Dept. 138, Syracuse, N. Y.

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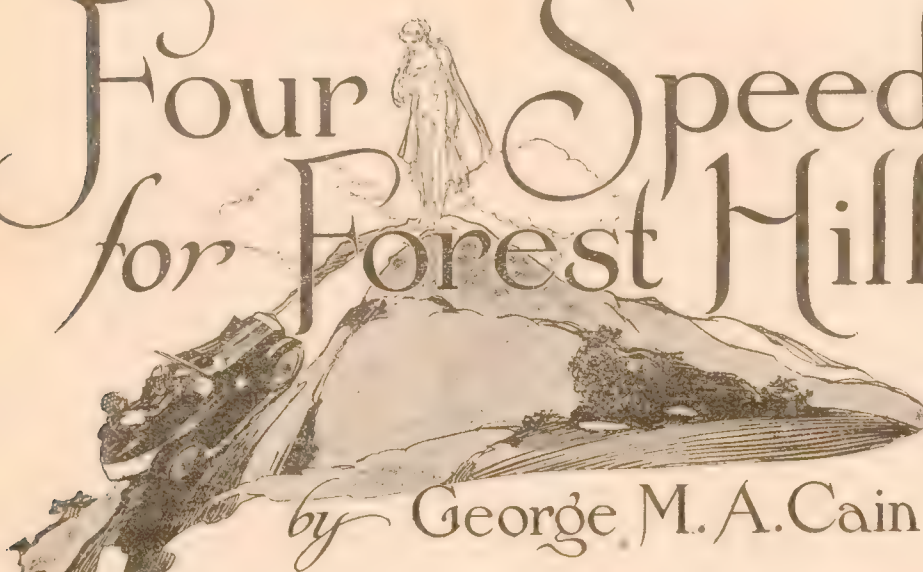
Vol. LXXXI

MARCH, 1916

No. 4



Four Speeds for Forest Hill



by George M. A. Cain

A FULL BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL COMPLETE.

CHAPTER I.

A RUSH FOR CARS.

HARDWICK ORTON rubbed his head with the dazed gesture of a man who has taken three drinks too many.

His newly fitted up salesroom and garage had been opened exactly fifteen minutes as the agency for the new Rollerton Six. He had got half through showing the car's good points to one customer when the second appeared. He was starting to give the pair a little road demonstration when number three showed up to ask to go along.

And these did not count the six mighty buyers who had drifted in with them. These three men had "buy" written all over their impatient faces. Orton had not

been selling automobiles five years without learning to distinguish the real prospect from the fellow who would be one if he could.

It couldn't be real. He had demonstrated to a careful many a time. But it had been a careful of relatives and friends of a highly tentative possibility of a buyer. Three buyers at once!

Well, if they really handed out good money as their deposits and signed their names to order slips, and he didn't wake up right afterward, he would know that he had at last found the thing he was looking for. He would have proven to his own satisfaction that he could sell a car when the right car was there to be sold.

"Control seems pretty easy," the one of

the three beside him remarked, in a crisp, hurried voice.

Orton pulled his wits together, and began again to talk as he drove.

"A run up Eagle Rock Hill will about show us all there is but the wearing qualities," he said.

"Oh, Second Avenue is good enough for me," quickly objected one of the men behind. "I'm in a hurry to get back."

"Yes—Second Avenue," both the others agreed.

The men knew hills, all right. But Newark's Second Avenue proved a joke for the little six.

"I'll take her," the three men spoke almost together. "That is," the one in front conditioned his promise, "if you can get it here in a week."

"Yes, of course," the two others hastened to put in.

"I surely can," Orton told them. "They've only to come from Scranton. It isn't like getting a car here from Detroit."

"Getting a car from Detroit!" echoed the man on the front seat. "I've been trying to get one away from the European war. I ordered a Shooting Star four months ago. From the looks of this little thing, I'm rather glad I didn't get it."

"You can afford to be," Orton agreed heartily.

"Well, I'd rather have got my Neville," one of the rear-seaters admitted; "but I couldn't wait all year for it."

"And I could better have afforded a flivver. I didn't think they could use them for war service. But if they aren't sending them over the pond, they're selling them to all the population this side. I couldn't get one," the other rear-seater said.

"Well, you can get this," Orton put in. "There were fifteen thousand of these at the Scranton shop a week ago. I guess there are a few more left."

And they went in with him, and handed out checks for a hundred dollars each, and signed their names as readily as if the order had been a petition to pardon the latest sensational murderer. And, out of the dozen people waiting in the shop, there were no less than six who watched them do it with their faces looking like children looking on at company getting a second helping of dessert.

Miss Stearn, Orton's freshly engaged stenographer, came from her typewriter desk to Hardwick's big one. She had three

letters in her hands. The top one was in a big yellow envelope, with a picture of the Rollerton Six shadowed over the entire front of it—a letter from the firm.

"No time for the mail now," Orton told her. "You might write a note to the Rollerton people telling them I'll read more of their suggestions to green salesmen when I can take the time from selling."

Then he went briskly after the next batch of eager customers. One of these met him half-way from his desk to the door.

"I guess I won't bother you for a demonstration," he said. "I notice those other three took the car after seeing it go. If you'll take my order—"

Orton started to pinch himself, then thought better of it. No use spoiling a beautiful dream like this. He went back to his desk.

"You'll have the car here inside a week?" the man was asking as Orton began to fill in the blanks. Then, just as he handed over his deposit, he mentioned as a secondary consideration:

"It really has six cylinders? I didn't look under the hood."

Half an hour later Orton came in from the second demonstration trip of the morning. Four people were treading on his heels in their anxiety to beat each other at getting their orders in.

"No mail or 'phone orders," he quoted gaily, as he waved Miss Stearn back to her typewriter and idle waiting.

At a quarter to one he came in from his fourth trip. He had given up the idea that he was dreaming. He had grown accustomed to the idea of selling automobiles at the rate of one every twenty minutes.

He was trying to figure his morning's profits. Twelve times twenty per cent. of eight hundred and forty-nine dollars—the only result he could get was a beautiful golden haze.

One reason why he knew now that he was awake lay in the fact that, while he went about this simple little matter of raking in orders at quick-lunch-counter speed, he was doing a little real day-dreaming. The golden haze was taking the form of a human face.

It was a feminine face. No man ever had a face that would fit into a golden haze. As a matter of fact, Hardy Orton had been seeing that face a good bit without any golden haze, and the haze appeared to fit the face rather than otherwise.

Really, Orton had been waiting for the haze in which to see the face.

Of course, a certain number of romantic millionairesses have been running away with chauffeurs ever since coachmen went out of style for elopement purposes. But Arlene Atherton was not the sort of girl to elope with a chauffeur. And Orton—well, he would have considered it deliberately unfriendly if you had called him a chauffeur.

Wherefore, being a plain business man, he had kept his head, and waited for the Rollerton Motor Car agency before proposing to the daughter of a near-millionaire.

Of course, he had not known that it was the Rollerton agency he was waiting for. He had thought he was waiting for real money, instead of the three or four thousand a year he had made with other cars.

But now he knew. If half a day's selling Rollertons totaled twelve times twenty per cent. of eight hundred and forty-nine dollars, there being two halves to each day, and three hundred and sixty-five automobile selling days in every year, a year's selling of Rollertons totaled real money. Rollertons and real money were synonymous.

Why, then, should he wait a year or so, and give all that chance to some other fellow whose real money happened to be in a bank, instead of a Rollerton agency? No why at all, not since he was Hardy Orton.

Even if Hardy Orton had considered patience a virtue to boast of, he could not have done any boasting. Hardy was a believer in the great American rule of life: Grab while the grabbing is good.

"Excuse me a moment, gentlemen," he said to five sure customers and nine or ten dubious ones, as he picked up his telephone and called for a number on the Branch Brook Central.

While he waited he called for the "helper" of Herman, his repair man. He told the youth to go out and bring in sandwiches and some coffee. He was too busy to eat a regular meal.

"Is Miss Atherton in?" he asked the voice that finally answered his call.

He knew then that Fortune had adopted him to-day for her own fair-haired son. Arlene was in.

"This is Hardy," he told her. He had never got to the first-names point before, but he could afford to try it now. "Hardy Orton," he had to elucidate, however, before she identified him.

"Oh, how do you do?" the girl inquired,

avoiding any name for him. "Where are you, anyhow?"

"Right down on Broad Street, opposite Central Avenue," he told her.

"I thought you were selling the Firefly cars on Washington Street," she answered.

"I was—I'm selling Rollertons now. And, believe me, I'm selling some, too. But I called up to know if you have anything on for this evening."

She hesitated an instant, and took refuge in doubt. "I'm not quite sure," she said slowly. "Why do you want to know?"

"Why, I thought maybe you'd like to take a spin, or something," he responded.

"Oh, in the new car? Say—is it a little car?" she answered with a question.

"Well, it's no truck," he answered; "but I wanted you to try out the big junk run-about."

"How much is this little car of yours?" she persisted in her own line of inquiry.

"Eight-forty-nine," he answered, impatiently; "just marked down from eight-fifty."

"Is it any good?"

"Of course, it's good. Look who's selling it. But I—"

"Say, is there any chance of getting one of those cars before Christmas?" she interrupted.

"You can get one in a week if you want one."

"Why, yes, I'll be delighted to take a ride in one of them. I might buy it. Father's promised to let me have a little car to drive myself. I've tried to get a dozen different makes, and they all want me to wait for delivery until some time next summer. What time can you get up here?"

A moment later he looked up at the waiting faces of the would-be next purchasers.

"Phew!" he exclaimed, "it's going some when you can't make a date to take out a girl without selling another car! Everybody's buying it."

After all, it might be a lot better to take her out to demonstrate a car than not to take her out at all.

CHAPTER II.

MOONLIGHT, A MOTOR AND A MAIDEN.

RIGHT here we might as well explain about the "junk car," to which Hardy Orton had referred in his telephone colloquy.

Up to the time when he was called up by

telephone at seven-forty-five to take his twenty-first order for that one day, Orton regarded the "junk car" as the crowning achievement of his life. It is doubtful whether the phenomenal number of sales changed his view.

As a matter of fact, Hardy had accomplished feats of selling which outclassed the mere taking of a lot of orders from people who were ready to buy anything on four wheels that they could get quickly. But, as a demonstration of ability to do anything and everything in the world that can be done to an automobile, his "junk car" stood in a class all by itself.

Outwardly the "junk car" belied its name by looking slightly in advance of the promised cars of 1916. Inwardly it was a mechanism to challenge the best. Yet it was Orton's constant boast that nothing new had entered its construction.

Its engine had come from a huge foreign car that had gone over an embankment and landed a tangled wreck—eight cylinders, sleeve-valve silence, eighty horse-power. The transmission had come from another wreck, and was strictly American. Rear construction had been found in a junk-shop. Wheels—but we have told enough.

The car was the work of a wizard in motor-construction. Hardy Orton was such a wizard. There are a few, even if you never can find one in a repair shop.

He sighed as he stuffed down another half dozen sandwiches in lieu of dinner, while he directed Herman in adjusting a bearing that had knocked annoyingly in the Rollerton on the last four demonstration trips.

It hurt him to take that Rollerton for the ride with Arlene Atherton. The "junk car" was part of himself; the Rollerton was business. It was turning his ride from personal pleasure into a demonstration of a car.

The sandwiches, however, braced him for the ordeal. After all, riding with her in a Rollerton was lots better than not riding with her at all. Besides, he could recall a time when he had started on a courting trip with another girl, decided he didn't want her, and sold her a car instead of marrying her. It would be poor work, if he could not reverse the proceeding.

He swallowed the last sandwich, directed Miss Stearn in mailing the orders, hurried Herman in getting the plate back on to the crank-case, and headed for his boarding-house at seven minutes of eight. At three minutes after eight he emerged again,

scoured, cleaned, and in a fresh suit. Two miles of traffic-ridden streets separated him from the front of the Atherton lawn. He rang the Atherton door-bell at ten minutes after eight.

For Hardy Orton had conceived an idea for the turning of the trip into something more than a demonstration. And Hardy Orton with an idea was one of the swiftest things in the world until the idea was accomplished.

The idea might not have appealed so well to some of Arlene Atherton's other male acquaintances. Orton had acquired, by quick imitativeness, the ability to talk decent English and to behave in company so as not to disgrace a suit of evening dress. But he had led too busy a life to get much beyond that outward appearance of good breeding. Of the inner rulings and workings of social life he was blissfully innocent.

Arlene kept him waiting twenty minutes after his arrival. For once in his days Orton took comfort from a delay when he had an idea boiling in his brain. The delay was pleasantly significant.

If, he surmised, she was interested only in his car, she would not keep him waiting. He had seen girls who were interested in cars before. If, however, she were interested in him, she would keep him waiting to hide the interest. And there you were.

Arlene came down alone. This was better than he had dared to hope. Orton had imagined he would have to go up against that highly distasteful invention of good society yclept a chaperon.

"I did want father to go with us," she apologized. "But he just telephoned that he won't get back from New York until ten. I guess, though, since it's to be my car, he will let me decide whether I like it or not. He may object to the price, though."

Orton helped her aboard. His hand caught the impression that her elbow was trembling. He got almost the same sensation as if her elbow had been the vibrator of a spark coil; it circuited a little shock of delight through his whole system.

If she were that excited over the car, she would not have kept him waiting twenty minutes, would she? If she were afraid of him, she would not go out on a moonlight ride with him. If she were not interested in him, she would not be excited about going. Reason enough, then, for feeling cheerful.

Of course she kept him talking car. He

had to explain and show to her all the workings of the controls. He had to demonstrate the possibilities of handling with spark and throttle alone.

Since she expected to drive the car herself, he had to go into matters more strictly pertaining to a lesson than a sale. The realization that there would be other lessons to give set him talking up the car as he had seldom talked to a prospective buyer before.

But as they took the top of Montclair's hill with a rush, and then slid down into the long stretch of level road beyond Caldwell, her questions grew fewer. It was not long before his talk became interspersed with pauses that grew longer.

A lot of poetic nonsense has been written and spoken about those soulful pauses. You might get the idea that they proceed from a rapport of souls which needs no language to wireless emotions from heart to heart.

Get that idea out of your system. The secret of those pauses lies in the fact that the man forgets to talk about anything else while he wonders how, if, and whether he dares say one thing; and that the girl is afraid to talk of anything else for fear she'll keep him from saying that one thing.

Of course we would not predicate just those motives for Arlene Atherton's silence. Perhaps she was merely thinking of the car, listening in rapt abstraction to its rhythmic hum. Perhaps she was figuring on how to wheedle out of her father two hundred dollars more than he had mentioned as his willingness to pay for her car.

Anyhow, she was not wholly forgetful of the existence of the proprieties. A vague feeling seemed to disturb, with the thought that the scene before her was considerably farther from home than a mere demonstration of a car could warrant—especially by moonlight.

"Where in the world are we?" she finally broke in upon the longest pause.

"I just want to see if she'll do Fox Hill on high," he explained.

"Fox Hill!" she gasped.

He did not gasp, but he held his breath. He had set himself to put the momentarily all important query at the top of Fox Hill. Fox Hill seemed essential to the purpose.

She did not tell him to turn around. He took more courage. And the car took Fox Hill on high gear. Just over the top he stopped. He swallowed hard. It was as if he had actually run up the hill on his own legs.

Arlene was staring through a break in the woods at the valley below. It was a scene for a poet or a girl to rave over—low-lying mists thinly veiling the modest meadow from the silver gaze of the moon, hillocks tipped with white-blossomed apple-trees and dogwood, here and there a twinkling light in some enchanted farm-house, above all the mother-hills brooding over the silent, sleeping vales; mystery, mysticism, wonder.

"Well, do you like it?" Orton asked huskily.

"It is superb," she answered in a whisper.

"You're sure you want one?"

To him there was but one view. He dared not look at it—the curl on one cheek, the tilt of the nose, the turn of the lips made a combination that would upset his carefully planned campaign. Wherefore he looked and spoke of the car.

To her his words were disillusioning. She had thought him capable of appreciating such a scene as this, she had counted him a part of it, the human embodiment of its romance. And—he was just an automobile salesman.

"Oh, yes," she said dully.

"You shall have one," he told her.

"Of course, I'm not sure that father will let me," she now came back from the realm of dreams to say. "He said six hundred was to be the limit. But—"

"But I want to make you a present of one," he elucidated.

Then ensued a silence of seconds, during which his feelings were probably similar to those of the blind-folded man sitting in the electric chair and waiting for the current to come. Of course, the moment the words had passed his lips, he knew she would turn him down hard.

CHAPTER III.

A NOVELTY IN PROPOSALS.

EXACTLY six men had proposed to Arlene Atherton since her "coming out" three years before. Of the six only one had made a decent job of it, saying the kind of things that go to make up declarations of love in all the best-sellers. He was the one whom, when she had rejected him, and he had tragically asserted his intention to enter a monastery, she had told that he would find things more congenial in a sisterhood.

But this certainly was the most bungling thing she had got in the way of a proposal

—if Orton really meant it as such. Just for one chill second she reflected that she was a long way from the nearest of those twinkling lights, with a man whom she had thought she knew well enough to believe incapable of offering to give her a motor-car.

But a stir of breeze moved a little branch up in the top of one of the trees, and let enough moonlight sift down into his face to show her that he was far worse scared than he could scare her. He was taking this method of proposing all right.

And she hesitated. None of the others had interested her half so much as this man, in his own line about a hundred times as efficient as any other man she knew. He differed from the rest in many respects, but chiefly in that, while she had tried unsuccessfully to make herself believe she was in love with one or two of the others, she had never been quite sure she had convinced herself she was not in love with him.

The thought of conveying a gentle lesson in manners struck her as a life-saving idea to rescue her from the need of immediate answer.

"Why—why," she stammered, "of course it's awfully kind of you to make such an offer; but really, you know, a girl can't receive a present like that from a man—that is—"

She stopped in confusion. Her attempt to correct him was likely to seem a mere bid for a more out-and-out request for her hand.

"I know," he took her up—"unless they're engaged, at least. I suppose I oughtn't to offer it to you, not yet. I—er—"

"Well, you know, I haven't been in a position before where I could say anything," he hurried on. "But, the way these Roller-ton cars are selling, I'll begin to own real money by the end of a year. And I wanted you to know about it.

"Mind, I'm not asking you to promise to marry me yet. When I do I'll have the money in hand, not in the bush. It will take me a year—maybe two. And then I'm going to—"

"Please stop," she protested.

"I beg pardon," he gasped, trying to understand her interruption.

"Don't talk as if I were a—an automobile you wanted to buy—or rather make a deposit on it to hold it until you could raise the price. I'm not for sale, really."

For a moment he was nonplused. But

only for a moment. Though he was a little more rattled than ever before in his life, the situation was still to arise which would leave him hopelessly without some answer.

"What shall I say?" he finally faltered. Then, "Good Lord!" he exclaimed, with a sudden new thought, "you don't want me to tell you I love you, do you?"

That was the question with her. Did she? Not having any certain answer in her own mind, she gave him none, and he went on before she could construct a good evasion.

"You don't suppose I'd ask you to marry me if I didn't love you," he said.

"You didn't ask me to marry you," she reminded him, feeling that she must say something, and that his peculiar methods of questioning were so irregular that she was more apt to say the wrong thing than the right one. She had said the wrong one now.

"Well, I want you to marry me," he hastily corrected his omission. Then his usual gift of speech shoved him over the moment's difficulty and gave her another jolt. "You didn't suppose I wanted to give you an automobile to get you to be my sister, did you?"

"N-no." She stammered out the only word she could possibly think of.

"Well, then, how about it?" he demanded.

She suddenly decided it was time to quit, while she knew something about where the conversation might end.

"Oh, you ridiculous boy," she cried, with a forced little laugh in her voice. "Here it's after nine, and we're twenty miles from home, and if I'm not back by ten, the whole house will be up in arms. Please don't be foolish any more, but take me home."

Ridiculous boy was dangerously close to an accurate description of Hardy Orton. Fun and the weightiest business of life had never kept far apart in Orton's scheme. When he was not fixing or driving automobiles for business, he was fixing or driving them faster for pleasure.

And she was making fun of him. So long as his own seriousness had kept him from seeing her in any but a terribly serious light, she was as safe as a bronze goddess on a pedestal. He would worship her from afar with desperately reverent gravity. But—

She was laughing at him, dodging the issue, playing with him. He looked into her

face as she turned it toward him. He perceived that it was a perfectly human face, very lovely, very warm, a little saucy, terrifically tempting, hardly ten inches from his own.

Had she accepted him seriously, he would have kissed her forehead with the solemnity of performing a rite. But she teased him, and—

She suddenly found her neck surrounded by an arm not entirely free from the odor of gasoline, and her face fairly smothered against his as he held her thus and chuckled as he kissed her again and again.

Back up in the part of the country where Hardy Orton had been born they still play games with kisses as forfeits. Kisses may be the beyond-words expression of love, or they may be sheer fun. Just now they were, on Orton's part, a little of both.

She struggled to free herself, to get breath for a shriek of rage and terror. She got the breath, but—

The blatant bellow of a motor's horn startled her into thought again. She had no mind for being the heroine of a newspaper story that might come out of being rescued from her predicament. Neither did she wish to be passed by possible friends or acquaintances in just her present situation.

"Stop quick," she whispered, imperiously; "some one's coming."

He drew back a little. "Will you marry me?" he now demanded.

"Never!" she hissed, with a lot more fury than she felt.

She had herself to blame for making a game of things. He caught her again.

"Will you marry me?" he repeated, along with some more kisses.

"No!" she answered, fiercely.

The approaching motor's cut-out sounded frightfully near as the car came up the hill behind them.

"Will you marry me?" he spoke a third time.

A ray of light from the oncoming car's head-lamps flared into the foliage just above their heads.

"Y-yes," she whispered in frantic hurry.

He took a fraction of a second to snatch one more kiss. At the same time he used his free hand and his feet on pedals, levers, throttle, spark.

The little six responded nobly. As the car behind topped the grade and thus brought its shafts of light down, they fell

upon the back of another car rapidly disappearing into the dimness ahead. Hardy took the turn into the first cross-road with a skid that snatched the breath from Arlene. Then he stopped, while the pursuing car kept on its course.

"Well, they missed one touching scene," he remarked, blithely.

"Touching scene!" she echoed, hotly.

"Wasn't it, though?" he cried, gaily.

"Hardy Orton," the girl spoke fiercely, "do you want me to tell you what I think of you?"

He grinned. "I'd rather take it out in more kisses," he replied, insolently, meeting her flashing eyes with a dancing pair of his own.

She tried to maintain her look of fiery indignation. Had she known how hard it was for him to maintain his grin, she might have done it. Her eyes dropped.

"Please, Hardy, take me home," she begged.

He would gladly then have knelt before her, only the other way seemed to have worked so much better.

"All right—but one more kiss, first," he said.

From his look it would have been hard to determine whether refusal would cause him to take several or none at all. She tried to avoid chances.

"Just one," she assented.

"Lordy!" he whispered breathlessly, as he lost count, "I didn't know I did love you so well!"

"I didn't either," she answered, vaguely. The vagueness was made more vague by the fact that she did not again mention homeward return for another full minute.

Half an hour later they drew up before her front door. He had not been demonstrating speed. An automobile was almost as much part of him as his feet or his hands, and the ridiculous boy in him wanted to run and jump and howl for sheer joy.

Unconsciously they had gone the whole distance with exhaust cut out and roaring. If he had had his big eight-cylinder "junk-car" they would have landed in prison or a gutter.

But he missed the pleasure he had counted on getting out of lifting her from the car. The heavy-set figure of her father was limned in the moonlight, standing on the steps of the house as they drew up.

Before the shut-off motor had stopped its sucking whirl, his voice boomed out in a

single word, which carried the fearsomeness of the crack of doom—

"Well?"

CHAPTER IV.

A DECLARATION OF WAR.

ABOUT one American father in two hundred has a daughter into whom he can throw a scare. There was nothing so odd and peculiar about Mr. Atherton and his daughter.

Arlene danced to his side and threw her arms about him with the manner that keeps all good papas in their place.

"I've just been getting my car, daddy," she gurgled into his ear.

"Getting your car, eh?" Mr. Atherton echoed with about ninety-three per cent. of the caffeine extracted from his voice. "You certainly choose a funny hour for automobile-shopping. I thought I was going to have a chance to see the car before you invested. Oh, is that you, Hardy?" he finished, just recognizing Orton at this point.

"But I really had to take it when I could get it, after all the trouble we've had finding one. Isn't it a beauty?" the girl prattled.

"What kind of car are you selling now?" the father demanded of Hardy. "I thought you were agent for the Firefly."

"This is the Rollerton Six," Orton informed him. But he was not minded to practice any deception on his future father-in-law. He was in the mood for conquering worlds. "I just told Ar—"

"And he can deliver it inside a week," Arlene hastily interrupted.

"Inside a week! Great Scott!" cried the almost-millionaire. "Say, I don't know but—how much is it?"

"I'm giving—"

"Eight-forty-nine, marked down from eight-fifty," Arlene again interrupted, quoting Hardy's jest.

"Eight-forty-nine! Great Jupiter! Child, I told you six hundred was the limit. Eight-forty-nine! Nix!" exploded Atherton.

"It's nothing at all in—" Orton again attempted to explain.

"But I can't get any of the six hundred dollar ones," Arlene once more managed to shut him off. "And this is a six, daddy. You can't expect a six for—"

"I didn't expect a six," groaned her father, "But—but you say you can deliver in a week?"

"A week at the outside," Orton repeated.

"Are they really any good?" urged the father.

"The best thing I know at the price," Orton had to say, in defense of his car.

"Um-m-m-m, I don't know. I really intended to have a little car to knock around with myself. Eight-fifty is rather more than I wanted to pay for it, but—just run me around a couple of blocks, if you don't mind."

Mr. Atherton clambered into the front seat.

"Is the runabout any cheaper?" he asked, as he settled back.

"Forty-nine dollars cheaper," Orton told him, figuring meanwhile that he was going to get a rather unexpectedly good opportunity to mention the identity of Atherton's future son-in-law by taking him for a ride.

"I'm going too," Arlene suddenly determined. "I want to see how it rides in the back seat."

"Starter included?" the father inquired, as Orton turned it on.

"It's part of the car," Orton answered. "Everything you hear and see—including the knocks." The knock had been cured, or he might not have spoken so carelessly.

For a few minutes Mr. Atherton's attention was so wholly occupied with the car that it seemed useless to mention anything more important. He kept Orton busy answering queries, some of which betrayed a really expert knowledge of motors that surprised the man who was in the business.

"Quite a little car, Arlene," he finally spoke over his shoulder to his daughter. "How did you get next to it?"

"Why, Hardy called me up and told me about it," the girl responded.

"How did you know she wanted a car?" he asked then of Orton.

"I didn't," Orton told the truth. "I called her up to invite her to ride in my big runabout, and she wanted me to show her this car instead."

Mr. Atherton relapsed into silence. He had known Orton very well as an automobile man, having bought two of the cars which Orton had sold at another time. Hence his use of Orton's given name. But Orton as any part of the social scheme of things, as a man whom his daughter should call by a nickname, and from whom she should receive invitations to ride in a motor-car—this was food for quite novel lines of thought.

However, he had business in hand. He could quiz Arlene later on the other side.

"Eight-forty-nine and eight hundred are mighty near seventeen hundred dollars when the freight's paid, eh?" he questioned, thoughtfully. "And seventeen hundred dollars is a lot of money these days."

At his direction Orton was now on the way back, and less than ten blocks from the end of the ride. Wherefore Orton decided to avail himself of the opportunity Atherton's query afforded.

"You don't need to consider Arlene's car," he said; "that is, unless you object to my giving it to her as a memento of our engagement."

"As—as *what?*" Mr. Atherton's voice was as near a yell as a gasp can get.

"I asked Arlene to take it as a present," Orton elucidated a bit. "We got engaged so that she could accept it."

Mr. Atherton was a keen business man. His keenness did not end there.

Orton was by no means the first young man who had, for a time at least, found more favor with Arlene than with her father. Just once Mr. Atherton had come very near to finding out all there is to know about the effect of opposition on love. He had come near enough to grow wise.

"Quite an idea," he agreed with Orton so suddenly that Hardy had something the sensation of bumping into a stone wall when riding at high speed. He figuratively clutched at the dashboard to keep from going over it.

"Pardon my surprise," the wise parent went on. "I really ought to be used to this sort of thing by now. I hadn't known that you and Arlene were specially interested in each other. I—I congratulate you—or sympathize with you, Hardy. And I certainly congratulate you, Arlene. A good little motor-car is a lot more than you've got out of most of your engagements."

"*Fa-ather!*" Arlene cried, indignantly. "You know I never have been engaged to any other man in my life."

"All right, dear, if you say so," cheerfully agreed Mr. Atherton. "I wouldn't allow the pleasure of arguing about it to interfere with business. And, since I don't have to buy a car for you, I think I'll take one of these for myself. You say you can have one for me in a week?"

"Yes, sir, within a week," Orton answered, a trifle absently.

"Come in, and I'll give you your de-

posit," Atherton invited, as they reached the house again.

"By the way, you won't be selling anything in the three or four thousand dollar class next week, will you? I've a man who wants—"

Mr. Atherton's tone was quite casual as he uttered these rather amazing words on the way to his library.

"Next week!" Orton echoed. "Why, of course, not. I'm the agent for these Rol-lerton Sixes. I—"

"I didn't know," Atherton remarked. "You were selling Wheeler-Bensons the last time I inquired—or did you take the Firefly agency after that?"

"Yes; but I sold the Expressobile since I had the Wheeler-Benson agency, and the Brushby cycle-car," Orton said, in a puzzled voice.

Something in Atherton's manner gave him the feeling that he was being cross-examined and trapped, yet he could not tell why he felt so.

"Heavens!" Atherton exclaimed. "I should think you'd lose a lot of money shifting around like that."

And Orton saw the point.

"It did cost me something; but I was looking for just the right car and the right company to deal with," he explained, rather hastily. "I didn't care about doing business for two or three thousand a year. But I've sold twenty-two of these cars to-day. That's the kind of thing I've been wanting."

"Twenty-two cars in a day!" Mr. Atherton echoed. "I should think you would want it. I'd take that myself as a steady job. Arlene, I should say I do congratulate you! Twenty-two cars a day! But, look here, I want you to promise you'll never turn your poor old daddy from your door."

"I can show you the order-slips," Orton asserted, becoming angry at being made fun of.

"I don't doubt it for a moment," Atherton reassured him. "How much do you want—a hundred?"

"I don't want anything," Orton answered, taking advantage of the opportunity for a mild jab. "I'm perfectly willing to take *your* word as a gentleman for anything you say you'll buy."

"My dear boy, you're entirely mistaken. Honestly, I never thought of questioning your word. I had something entirely different in mind." There was no doubting the sincerity of this.

"Oh, you object to Arlene and me being engaged," Orton inferred, aloud.

"To a man who can sell twenty-two motor-cars a day?" exclaimed the father. "I should say not. You're just what she needs. *You'll* be able to do what I never could—to keep up with her milliners' and modistes' bills. Take her, and God bless you!"

He arose as he spoke. Somehow he managed to give the action the quality of a dismissal, despite the words he was uttering. Orton felt impelled to take his departure. The impulse saw him from under the Atherton porte-cochère and into the street.

Hardy Orton had two minutes of gloom as he drove back to his garage. Somehow he felt that Atherton had cheated him out of a pleasanter parting from his sweetheart than the mere "Good night" they had spoken. He felt, too, that his future father-in-law had been playing with him in a fashion he was at a loss to comprehend.

But two minutes of gloom was enough for such a night. Hardy Orton was of cheerful, hopeful disposition. As he backed the demonstration car into its place in the middle of the show-room and looked about him, he readily appreciated that this had been his day of days.

Twenty-two cars—more than three thousand dollars of clear profit for himself—and Arlene his! It was almost incredible.

But was it? Hadn't he always known that, given the right car and the right sort of backing, he could set the pace for most of the automobile salesmen in the world? Hadn't he also guessed that the only thing which stood between him and Arlene Atherton had been his own unwillingness to talk love to her while he was unable to see his way clear to marrying her?

And it was time that he landed somewhere. He was twenty-seven years old. In the five years since he had inherited the old farm and sold it for ten thousand dollars, he had been agent for fifteen different cars. He had sold all of them as well as he could expect.

Yet, having paid a thousand dollars for the first quarter-year of his lease on this place, and the wholesale price of his demonstration car, he had less than six hundred in the bank, and no assets beside the "junk-car," the shop equipment, and the orders taken to-day.

It had taken him long enough to land. The landing, however, had been worth the time. A week would see him far better

fixed than when he had begun. A month would make him richer than he had hoped to be at thirty-five.

A year—well, of course, he could not sell so many cars in winter. Besides, when the company saw what he was doing, it would slow him up by making him a member. He would probably have to be satisfied with half a million.

And he would be. Nobody had any business expecting to do better than that in a year when most business was wallowing in misery over the war on the other side of the world.

Satisfied? Well, rather. Half a million was real money. Half a million as a mere flying start—

Could it be real? He looked about the room once more, as if to gather assurance from its quite solid and certainly familiar features.

His eye fell upon his desk. He bethought him of putting down the two fresh orders—his own for Arlene's present and the other for her father. He unlocked the roll-top and lifted it.

There lay the day's mail, the letter from the firm on top. He smiled. This was the tenth note of instructions he had received from them. Maybe they would think he knew a little about selling cars himself when they had received to-day's orders.

He tore open the envelope. He might as well see what more the manager had to say.

An instant later he was staring at the printographed words somewhat as Belshazzar stared at the handwriting on the wall. A sort of gurgle came from his throat as he tried to swallow and moisten it.

He raised his eyes to the calendar once, as if to seek some aid from the big figure "1" under the smaller printed "Tuesday" and "June."

Thence he returned his stare to the date at the top of the note. "May 29, 1915." It was quite unmistakable. Yesterday afternoon it must have arrived and remained on his desk while he spent the last hours of the day in tuning up the new car on the road. As for the rest of the note—read it:

DEAR SIR:

The company having just closed a contract for immediate delivery of ten thousand cars, presumably for foreign destination, and having received during the past week orders considerably in excess of the remaining cars in stock, you are advised that deliveries on all future orders will probably be delayed from thirty to sixty days.

You will of course appreciate the advertising value of such unprecedented selling as has taken place, and will use it as you see fit in local advertisements.

Very truly yours,

THE ROLLERTON MOTOR CAR COMPANY,
JHT—NM. Joshua H. Tibbers, Mngr.

During the half hour that remained until midnight Hardy Orton racked his brain in efforts to remember a single customer of to-day who had not seemed more interested in the immediate delivery than in any other feature of the car. He failed.

He looked wildly at the car which from being the original golden-egg layer had suddenly become just a natural layer of goose-eggs. He walked over to its side and gave a tire a vicious kick.

"But I'll see if they're going to make a blamed fool of me," he snarled.

And that was his declaration of war. Fifteen minutes later the "junk-car" was backed across the curb and left there just long enough for Orton to step back and lock the front door of the salesroom-garage. Its huge hood and glaring headlights pointed toward the nearest road for Scranton, Pa., and the manufacturing plant of the Rollerton Motor-Car Company.

CHAPTER V.

MAKING A FOOL OF HIMSELF.

ORTON had to put a new tube in a front tire before starting. Nobody who heard him do it would have ventured to assert that the task calmed him any.

On the run which he had started upon just after midnight he had several close calls, but managed to reach Scranton a little after eight o'clock, tired, hungry, in a frame of mind to row with his own shadow. As he made for the Rollerton factory he turned a corner in a manner to contravene the traffic regulations, and the officious officer on the post compelled him to back up and turn right so as to remember the regulation next time.

If his fervor for a lurid interview with the Rollerton manager had lacked anything before, it was ample, sufficient and abundant after he got through with that policeman. He was all but frothing at the mouth as he stalked past the office-boy and entered Mr. Tibbers's office without the formality of rapping on the closed door.

Before the surprised manager or the stout gentleman talking to him could utter a

word of greeting or of protest Orton had begun without preliminaries:

"What in blazes is this about not delivering for a month or more?"

The stout gentleman looked puzzled still. Mr. Tibbers glanced from one to the other for an instant, and then answered with an introduction:

"Mr. Rollerton, this is Mr. Orton, our new Newark agent."

If last night had not seen the sole instance of bashfulness ever recorded against Orton, he could not remember the other instances. The fact that he addressed the president of the company but caused him to enlarge upon his theme:

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Rollerton," he said with a snap, "but I'll be a whole lot gladder when somebody tells me what this note means. I sold twenty-three cars yesterday on the promise of delivery inside a week, and then I get this letter telling me I can't expect them inside a month. I want to know right here and now what kind of a deal you're trying to hand me. And I want twenty-three cars this week and enough more to keep me going at the same rate indefinitely. I—"

But Mr. Tibbers was one of those men who keep cool and see any way out that happens to show so much as a glimmer of light through a knothole. He broke in on Orton's over-voiced tornado of verbiage:

"You say the letter reached you last night? I don't see how that can be. I personally saw that it went off on Saturday night."

"I don't know when it reached me, and I don't care. I was too busy selling your darned cars yesterday to stop and read letters. And now I want the cars—and I intend to have them, too—and enough more to keep me going."

Mr. Rollerton had been smiling when Orton came in. The smile had disappeared for an instant at the unexpected entrance, but it came back now and camped on his plump features in a regular grin. The man actually chuckled.

"Certainly, Mr. Orton. Just help yourself. Go right out there in the assembling room and the storage rooms and take any car you see. Tell the shipping clerk I said you could. You might add a few kind words to cheer him up. I just had to tell him that inasmuch as we can't get another car ready for shipment for a week and our capacity can't exceed six cars a day the

rest of the season he could get his time as soon as he's through billing the cars we've loaded this morning."

He chuckled some more. Most men in his position would have chuckled. It was just ten days since a committee of creditors had told him he must settle by the first of June or they would put him in bankruptcy. It was just sixty days since the foreign agent for whom the fifteen thousand Rollerton cars had been designed and built had reneged in the order.

To get that near the bread-line and then to have the opening agencies make five thousand sales and another foreign agent take the ten thousand cars for better than the original contract price was material for several chuckles.

Certainly he was not going to stop chuckling for the blood in the eye or the wrath in the voice of a mere agent than whom, since he could not possibly fill half the orders coming, few things could be more useless in his business.

"Oh, you think it's a joke, do you?" raged Orton. "I tell you I want those cars. Mr. Tibbers here told me I would get delivery as quickly as freights could make it. And I'm going to get it."

"I said," Tibbers here put in, "so long as the cars lasted."

"And that they would last all summer and half the winter," Orton reminded him.

"Of course, that was merely a mistaken prediction on my part," the manager stated, smiling with his boss.

"Mistaken prediction, eh? Well, that mistake will cost you some money if I don't get the cars to fulfil the prediction. If you people are fools enough to let go the chance to put your car on the map—to let that chance go in order to grab a war order for a few dollars in one season—"

The sentence was getting away from him in his excitement, and his voice arose accordingly: "If you're that sort of fool concern, I'm here to tell you that you can't make the same sort of fool of me. I took the agency and I've sold the cars, and I'm going to have them, I tell you. And I'm going to have enough to fill future orders."

But he merely amused the two. Rollerton's chuckle grew more pronounced.

"Didn't I just tell you, Mr. Orton," the president of the company spoke with mocking suavity, "that all the cars in the place are at your command? Can I do more than

to tell you to take any car you see that you want?"

Orton was physically exhausted; he shook with rage at the mockery.

"Laugh, if you like," he snarled. "We'll see who'll laugh in a court, though, before I'm through with you."

And he turned on his heel and stalked out at the door.

The talk of courts was bluff, and he knew it. It appeared that they knew it, too, since they had kept on laughing. Just once Orton had tried to beat a company in court, and he would wait long before trying it again.

He was ruined. Yesterday morning he would not have considered any difficulty with a motor-car company a serious matter. It had always been too easy to find some other company's agency.

But the Rollerton cars, with immediate delivery, had meant a fortune for him. Now they meant little or nothing. And he had made of himself a bigger fool than the company was making of him by getting engaged to a girl he could not marry without the fortune.

He felt a wave of desperate anger which might have set him hurling bricks through the factory's windows had the idea occurred to him. He walked blindly out of the waiting-room. He stopped only when he realized that he had turned the wrong way.

He was in the vast assembling room, where, six weeks ago, he had seen long rows of Rollerton Sixes rubbing hubs and run-boards. It was as empty now as it had been full then.

CHAPTER VI.

BACK TO EARTH.

HALF way down the big, empty room's length a youth was raising a huge dust with a broom. At its far end stood a dingy desk with another man writing as fast as he could. To the right was a wide door opening on a long platform, beside which stood a row of freight-cars.

On the cars stood Rollerton Sixes, three to the car.

Hardy Orton might be blind with rage when the last ray of hope's light had been extinguished. He was not too blind to see a ray.

"Help yourself to any car you see," Rollerton had laughingly bidden him. Also he

had mentioned cheering up the shipping clerk.

With a quick glance behind him Orton hurried to the desk and the man who was writing as if to save his life from an internal explosion.

"Excuse me, you're the shipping clerk, aren't you?" Orton began.

"Yep," came the response without an upward look.

Orton extended one of his newly printed business cards with the Rollerton Company's name in big type and his own in small. He had to place it almost under the clerk's nose.

"Mr. Rollerton just told me I could take any cars I saw out here. I want those out on the freight-cars," Orton said easily.

Then the shipping clerk looked up. Also he spoke up. We decline to undertake the task of separating the printable from the rest of his speech.

"Oh," Orton still spoke easily, "it's all right. I'm the agent for the company at Newark, New Jersey. If I haven't orders for all the cars out there I will have before they get to Newark."

"For the Lord's sake, man, don't you know those cars are already billed, shipped—along with ten thousand others we've been working night and day to load—all for E. J. DuSillaise—in New York? What do you want here, anyhow?" growled the clerk.

"Just those cars. Mr. Rollerton just said I could have them."

Orton smiled benevolently as he spoke. He had bethought him to provide for some difficulty in satisfying the mind of the clerk. It was his left hand which he now rested on the desk under the clerk's eyes. It was quickly lifted, all but one finger, which still held down the center of five bills arranged to show the "X" in the corner of each.

"Can you change the billings for me right away?" Orton inquired softly.

"I couldn't do that," the shipping man said slowly and regretfully, his eyes on the money.

"Why not?" Orton wheedled. "You're fired anyhow. You've got all the alibi you need. A duly accredited agent of the company tells you that the president said he could have the cars. I've a witness that he said it, though I don't really think he meant it. He thought he was joking."

"Yes, damn him!" snapped the clerk with sudden resumption of his anger. "He thought he was joking when he told me I'd

be able now to enjoy a summer vacation. If—if—if you'll double that ante, I'll see you."

"Can't do it here," Orton readily responded. "But I'll send you a perfectly good check as soon as the cars are in the Newark freight station of the Lehigh Valley road."

"I'll come to your place for the cash," the clerk decided. "I live in Newark anyhow."

Orton stayed long enough to see the clerk make out a bundle of fresh tags. Then, fearful lest his presence betray the plot, he took the chance on the fellow's honesty and hurried out.

He would be taking chances until the cars were delivered to their purchasers. After that there was little the Rollerton Company could do to him. He felt almost as much cheered as if his mission had succeeded. Human nature was made with a love for putting something over on the other fellow.

Of course, having disposed of the thirty machines which were on the ten freight-cars at the factory, his agency for the Rollerton Company would come to an end, probably with something of a crash. But thirty cars would afford him a profit beyond any ordinary year's work, and far beyond what he could get out of trying to sell the cars on long deferred delivery.

He would be approximately five thousand dollars ahead, besides his shop lease, equipment and demonstration car. Not since his first two attempts at the business had suffered tremendously by his inexperience had he been able to quit an agency in such condition as this.

He would be in a position to—

Suddenly he sat up in his car, galvanized into fresh energy. Why bother with another company, another agency?

Why not manufacture cars? Why not be his own boss?

Wouldn't five thousand dollars in real money entitle him to twenty thousand worth of credit? Wasn't the "junk car" he was driving ample demonstration of his ability to construct a car? Had he ever sold a car he could not have improved upon?

An assembled car, it would be, of course—something built with the next to lowest price in view. An assembled car might be a little costlier to build. The profits still vastly exceeded those of selling as an agent.

He must start small. He would sell his

own output. Every car sold would enable him to build two more. Newark would provide him abundant market this season. Manufacturing his own parts and starting outside agents could come later.

He was foolish not to have done it in the first place, only in the first place he had lacked the knowledge he now possessed. Now he could almost figure out the cost of production in his head.

He got this far over a breakfast which took on the proportions of a dinner as he thought and ate. He had stopped at the first restaurant he saw. Now he left his car and walked back to the factory and made his way past the railroad spur to the big assembling room. The shipping clerk met him with a grin.

"It's all fixed up," he announced in a tone to indicate that Orton's cheering had been thoroughly successful. "An engine will pull the cars out of here in about half an hour. I'm making a show of verifying my bills before leaving, so that they won't see these before the cars are well out of Scranton. If they don't get suspicious, I'll hold them all afternoon. I want that other fifty."

Orton got back to the "junk car" and headed for home. He was humming a gay little tune as he started off. He had not got ten miles out of Scranton before a tire which had been badly cut on the night run blew out.

The sun was high and hot. His car carried heavy tires, was heavy itself. He kept on humming while he changed shoes, though the sweat trickled down his spine and the mosquitoes nibbled his face, found the sensitive spots between the bottoms of his trousers and the tops of his ties, and feasted thereon.

On the edge of Stroudsburg a policeman stopped him and threatened to take him to the lock-up for speeding. Orton argued with the officer for half an hour—and they parted good friends.

In trying to make up for lost time he struck a bit of fresh-oiled road at a fifty-mile gait. The car spun completely around twice and stopped with both right wheels in a gutter a foot deep and a front spring broken.

Even the two hours and a half it took to walk to the nearest blacksmith shop, get the clamp he wanted made, return, and make it fast so as to hold the spring the rest of the journey—even that and another

hour spent in getting the car out of the gutter—failed to disturb seriously his peace of mind.

His equanimity was not due to his victory over the Rollerton Motor Car Company. He really had not won. Instead of a summer of tremendous and profitable sales, he had at best managed only to save the profits for one day and a half's work.

Nor could his invincible happiness be accounted for by the mere fact that he had got out much more profitably than he had heretofore quit other agencies. He was happier than he had been yesterday over a prospect of multiplying these profits by a hundred.

Though he was young enough to get the full enjoyment out of the trick he had turned upon the company, this was not enough in itself to sustain him in such good cheer.

Orton's happiness came from the prospect of a new business.

The Orton Car! The sound of it was music in his brain. He saw it as it should look completed, its lines of body graceful and attractive without adding at all to the expense of its manufacture.

Already he had determined who should manufacture the motors for Ortons, upon the very motors themselves, since they were already well known and widely used in cars of the thousand-dollar class.

In the matter of gears his choice between two he had in mind would depend upon the close proximation of one or the other's stock in hand to the requirements of his car's length. It was not possible for him to carry all the items in his head, but he believed he was allowing liberally for costs when he had figured at about five hundred for a car vastly better than any seven hundred dollar car on the market.

It is doubtful if he would have gone straight to his place of business if it had not been after seven when he reached Newark. He would hardly have overcome the desire to interview the makers of parts who were to be found in New Jersey's biggest town.

To-morrow he would be up early and start on the round of the factories, unless the Rollertons had arrived by that time, in which case he would have to hurry their distribution before the company could stop it.

He was held up for a moment by a slight block in the traffic under the Lackawanna bridge over Broad Street. To his surprise

he heard his name shouted from the curb. As he turned to look he saw leaping toward him the Rollerton Company's ex-clerk of shipping, who had evidently made much better time by train than Orton had accomplished with his motor.

"Your cars are here already," the man cried cheerfully. "They came straight through and are on the sidings of the Lehigh Valley already. I was up at your shop to tell you, but found you weren't in, so just started for home. My folks live up this way."

"Here already?" Orton cried in delight. "Say, we're lucky for once, eh? Did they get on at all up at the works?"

"Hadn't when I left," the clerk assured him. "And Mr. Tibbers had gone home for the night. It was half-past three when I turned over the desk key to his stenographer and beat it for the train."

"Well, get in. We'll run right down there. Rollerton will probably swallow his joke when he finds out; but it won't hurt to set those cars rolling toward their destinations beforehand. And you can help me. Guess the best plan will be to tow them to the garage with this machine. I'll be able to —"

"I'm afraid I can't do that," the clerk objected. "I telephoned ahead that I'd be home at half-past six, and it's after seven now."

"Oh, all right. I've a man at the garage anyhow. He'll be waiting there for me. But let me have the way-bills, unless—"

"I mailed them."

"No matter," Orton said. "They know me down there at the freight station."

"But, Mr. Orton"—the ex-clerk now spoke in a hesitant tone that proclaimed what he would say before the words were out—"If you could let me—"

"Sure, come along down to the garage. I think I've got fifty in cash in the safe." Orton invited readily enough.

"Oh, I'll wait till to-morrow. You see there's a fellow next door I owe seventy-five, and I thought, if you had it on you, I'd square him up before he got to hollering. I suppose you haven't twenty-five more on you?"

"No"—I gave you almost all I had, and a break-down on the way home took pretty near all the rest," Orton explained apologetically.

And then something about the man's manner gave Hardy Orton the feeling that

the fellow wanted to ask him for the two or three dollars he still had upon him. The ex-clerk finally climbed down from the running-board he had mounted for the parley, without saying more than that he would drop into the shop to-morrow for the balance of his bribe.

But he had succeeded in arousing in Hardy a vague, quite unintelligible suspicion that all was not well, that he might not have spoken the exact truth as to the presence of the thirty Rollerton Sixes in the Lehigh Valley's Newark yards. Orton determined to go right on out there before putting up his car.

He did not have to do it. A block below he could see his place of business. A crowd was standing before it. A policeman stood in front of it, as if in anticipation of some possible trouble. As Orton reached the spot he saw that the lights had been turned on and that another crowd was inside.

Orton's approach was the signal for several persons who had grown familiar with the sight of his car to raise the cry, "Here he is!"

"Ah-h-h!" came from twenty throats at once, a sound like the growl of a pack of hungry and angry dogs.

Orton looked his amazement from one face to another. He recognized his guests as the men who yesterday had given him orders for cars. Two others of the faces were familiar. They were the sallow, solemn visage of Mr. Joshua H. Tibbers and the rotund but no longer grinning one of B. K. Rollerton. From beside these two stepped one more whom Orton did not recognize at all. He hurriedly presented Hardy with a folded piece of paper.

"That, sir," he pronounced very solemnly, "is a notice of an order temporarily enjoining you from doing any business under the name or as having official connection with the Rollerton Motor Car Company. And this—" He extended another paper so that Orton in his amazement could not dodge the tagging of his person with it — "And this is a summons to appear immediately in the Sixth District Court of Essex County to show to that court whether the action against you should be civil or criminal."

"I may add that this last matter will be determined largely by your willingness or unwillingness to turn over either to these officers of the company or to the original depositors here present the amounts they

have deposited as part of the purchase price of Rollerton automobiles."

CHAPTER VII.

VANISHING CAPITAL.

FOR one brief moment Orton's brain refused to act. He stared in blank amazement at the process-server, at the two members of the Rollerton firm, at the twenty would-be purchasers of Rollerton Sixes.

Oddly the first real cerebation began with the last detail of the situation. He sensed, at a single leap, the reason for the peculiar actions of the Rollerton's ex-ship-ping-clerk. That corruptible young man had tried to mulct him for the last possible penny before he should find out why there was no more to pay.

From that his mind leaped to another fact. The cars had probably never started for Newark. The attempt to divert them hither had been discovered before they had been taken out of the factory switch.

But now, if they still had their cars, what did Rollerton and Tibbers want of him? Whence this ado?

"I ask," and he spoke a little huskily, "just what all this means?"

"It may mean a charge of grand larceny," snapped the legal representative. "Mr. Rollerton is ready to accept any explanation you have to offer before carrying things to that extent, however."

"Grand larceny of what?" Orton demanded.

"Thirty motor-cars. That was the number you tried to have sent to you here instead of their proper destination," replied the lawyer.

"Attempted larceny, it appears, then," he now corrected the legal light. "You don't seem very well up in these matters; but you might possibly be able to tell me what it would be if I told you to go out into my store-room and help yourself to anything you saw that you wanted, and you went and took something."

The man—he really was the youngest member of a Newark firm of lawyers—seemed a bit fussed by this retort.

"Why—of course—" he stammered, and turned a flushing face upon Rollerton.

"Yes, of course," snapped Hardy, who was holding his rising wrath in check now until it might help him to a climax in the discomfiture of his accusers. "Yes, of

course. And that is just exactly what this gentleman, the president of the Rollerton Motor Car Company, told me to do this morning. He told me to help myself to all the cars I saw."

Mr. Rollerton fidgeted. "I said all the cars you saw in the assembling-room," he answered weakly.

"You did not. You said I should go to the assembling-room and take all I saw. It makes quite a difference. I could see several cars that were not in the room."

"I thought you'd have sense enough to understand that I was joking." Rollerton now spoke more belligerently.

"And I may have thought you'd have more sense than to indulge in so stupid and expensive a joke," Orton caught him up. "Now, what I want to know right here and now is, whether I get the cars you agreed I should have for these people or not."

"You'll get nothing. A man that will try to bribe my clerks into sending him goods already billed elsewhere couldn't represent my firm selling shoe-strings on the sidewalk," blustered Rollerton.

"That's all I want to know, Mr. Rollerton," Orton snarled. "It happens that I haven't been to the bank yet with these gentlemen's checks. They get them back right here and now. If they want your cars they can go to you and buy them—but not in my store."

He turned to the safe as he spoke and began twisting the handle of the combination.

"For the benefit of you gentlemen who were fooled as I was in the idea that the Rollerton Motor Car Company was an honorable and reputable concern," he continued as he got the safe open and drew out a bank-book in which the checks were clasped—"for your benefit, I wish to explain exactly what has happened."

"I took the agency for this car on the agreement and promise of those two men that I could make deliveries as fast as the cars could be freighted to me. Last night I got the information that no deliveries would be forthcoming for thirty days or more.

"I started at midnight and drove to Scranton—to get you men the cars I had promised you. And this Mr. Rollerton, who has utterly depleted his stock and emptied his shops to meet a hurry-up war order, thought it would be funny to tell me just to help myself to anything I saw,

knowing that his whole place was as bare of cars as a barn.

"I went to the big assembling-room that was jammed with machines when I saw it ten days before. Of course it was empty. But I saw cars loaded with Rollerton Sixes enough to fill your orders, and I did what I could to see that you got them.

"Here, Mr. Jones—here, Mr. Allen—Mr. Romaine—Mr. Wood. You can order your cars from Mr. Rollerton if you want to wait until he's ready to give them to you. You can't order a bolt for one of them from me."

He went on with the distribution. As he handed the last buyer his check he received a burst of applause from them all.

"I thought you looked honest," one cried. "But this man called me up and said we should come to collect our deposits from you if we could, because the company had found you utterly untrustworthy, and—"

"U-m-m," grunted Orton. "I supposed there was something like that. Here, Mr. Rollerton, is something for you. It's my contract with your firm."

He ripped the paper four ways as he handed it to the head of the company. He was not wholly without an eye to the dramatic, which, of course, had its place in his business.

His final act was to snatch a screw-driver from Herman's hand, as the machinist stood gaping his astonishment at the whole scene. Orton made his way to the show-window. The Rollerton name was writ in showy, beveled letters glued to the glass. Orton had paid a good price for those letters. With a single sweep of the screw-driver's point he brought them down, a tangled heap of papier-mache and gilt.

"And now, if you're ready, we'll go down to the city hall and tell the judge to make that injunction permanent—eternal! For a company that welches on its agreements and a man who welches on his own jokes even, I wouldn't give away golden automobiles for brass bar-checks to save him from Hades!"

Two hours afterward, however, Orton sat in a cheap restaurant over an untasty and untasted meal. There are men who, even in a hospital with broken bones and cracked heads, can get comfort out of the thought that the other principal in the scrap looks worse than they do. But Orton's wrath

had cooled. The glow of his own triumph and the satisfaction in Rollerton's embarrassment and discomfiture had faded.

He had thought to begin a new business with five thousand dollars in clear money. He had less than five hundred now.

Of course he still held the lease on the shop, and had paid half a year's rent on it. Also he owned the equipment, which, with a few additions, could be used to assemble new cars on a small scale. His demonstration Rollerton, used but a day, ought to bring nearly its full price in the present eager market for motor-cars.

Eight hundred and five hundred—at worst it would be well over twelve hundred. That was enough to purchase parts for three of the Orton cars, according to his rough estimates. It was enough to guarantee credit for a dozen sets of parts.

There was no question of selling cars this season. With a dozen cars sold, he would have no difficulty in going on. His credit would be readily extended.

Orton began to munch a little on the bread and butter. Then he attacked a sadly cooled slice of roast. After all, things were not so hopeless as they had seemed.

It would mean a little delay, of course. It would mean economies he rather hated to practise, especially since—

Great Scott! He hadn't so much as telephoned Arlene since they had parted last evening. He hadn't thought to send her flowers or candy or any other token that he remembered her existence.

Well, Arlene would understand when he told her. He got up and went to the restaurant's telephone booth. He expected her first words would have edge to them. They did.

"Oh, is that you?" came in icy tones. "I'm glad you have found time at last to remember my existence. Really, I had always supposed men reserved this sort of absent treatment of women until after they were married, at least."

"Say, Arlene—darling—say—just wait a moment, until I tell you," Orton pleaded.

"You'd better tell me," she answered with a little softening of her tone into banter.

"Well, I started and motored to Scranton—started just after midnight last night. That Rollerton company sent me word that it wouldn't deliver my orders for a month or more, and I went up to raise—Ned about it.

"And I had all kinds of trouble getting there and back—didn't get to Newark until after seven. We've certainly had a beautiful row—I'll tell you about it to-morrow. I'm through with the Rollerton car.

"But I'm glad of it. It gives me a chance now to start making my own car. Unless something goes wrong, I'll be having you in to see the first Orton by the end of the month. And it will be worth seeing, too.

"Say, will you be free to-morrow night? I want to have that spin in my runabout. I'd come around yet this evening, but I broke a spring and I haven't had any sleep and—"

"You poor boy," she murmured sweetly. "But, Hardy, you're going to have my car ready for me by the end of the week, aren't you? You know—"

And he suddenly knew. Not for six or seven worlds would he admit that he regretted having become engaged to Arlene Atherton. Yet, as he thought of eight hundred dollars he had just figured carefully into the business, he could not keep a certain catch from his voice as he answered.

"Why, would you be willing to take the one we had out last night?" The thought of parting with its price even put a half plea on his lips. "Of course, it's been used a little—one day's demonstrating—but it's in good shape, better than when it came from the shop."

"Why, I'll be delighted to get it," she promptly replied. "I'd a lot rather have a car that you had tried out than any other. See how much I think of your judgment!"

"It's yours!" He tried to say it as if he were perfectly delighted.

"When will you be through with it? I don't want it until—"

"Through with it!" he echoed out of the bitterness in his heart. "I never was so everlastingly, completely, infernally through with anything in my life as I am right now with that car."

"Oh, no, you're not," she cheerily responded. "You've got to teach me to run it."

And he performed two mental somersaults. For one fraction of a second he began another gasp of dismay at thought of losing precious moments on a job her chauffeur might as well do for her. For another instant he reflected gloomily that it could make no difference. He could not begin to make automobiles on five hundred dollars. Then he decided that there would be no lit-

tle consolation in the light task of instructing her.

"That will be something to show for my venture with the Rollerton bunch of thieves," he told her. "I'll try to teach you as little as possible in as much time as I can take to it."

"Why?"

"To prolong the joys of teaching," he explained.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON A SHOE-STRING.

ORTON failed to finish his unappetizing supper. He walked out with the full intention of getting into his bed in the shortest possible time. But getting to sleep was a different matter from lying down and trying to. He had some pretty serious thinking to do.

The five thousand in commissions on the Rollerton cars was gone. The eight hundred to have been got out of the demonstration Rollerton was gone. He had five hundred left, over and above the lease-hold paid up for six months and part of the equipment necessary for turning parts into a whole car.

It was not enough. Plain, common business sense told him that he lacked the capital necessary for the undertaking. The best he could do would be to build up a business in repair work. In time he could earn two or three hundred a month. It was not so much worse than he had done with the agencies.

Two or three hundred a month! The idea was laughable. He might as well take the wages of a mechanic. He was engaged to the daughter of a rich man.

He might have lived most of his life on two or three hundred a month, but he had never dreamed of staying at that level. He had thought of himself, dreamed of himself, as possessed of capital and income somewhat commensurate with his own estimate of his abilities.

And now his thinking must be turned into action. He had got himself into a corner, where he must fight or lose all hope of winning. Arlene should be the incentive of the fight. She was just what he had needed all the time.

He would fight. In other words, he would manufacture automobiles.

He got out of bed and turned on the

light, got some paper and began to figure. Two hours later he had prepared a demonstration that proved his abilities were not all mechanical.

Five hundred dollars in cash, a thousand in a lease, eight or nine hundred in fittings, what Orton knew of the money market at the moment, one big "X" to represent the unknown quantity of days of credit to be got out of a dozen different makers of machinery and automobile parts, the wages of two mechanics and their helpers, the amount they could do per day and per hour of overtime, the amount he could add to their doing, the eagerness of the public to buy automobiles—

He had juggled and re-juggled these things together so that they formed a car—twenty-five cars, in fact, to be finished and sold by the fifteenth of July, alias forty-two days from date.

Of course, there was still the "X." He convinced himself, however, that he had done his figuring calmly, and with nothing but the concrete facts in mind. This left him his own enthusiasm, still untouched. Since that was unbounded, he could draw on it indefinitely for all that was needed to bring the "X" up to the proper amount.

Also there was a "Y." He could not tell how certainly he could get parts in time for the finishing of those cars. However, there is competition in all these things. Men would be loath to refuse him a small order of parts and let other men capture the large orders later on.

Since "X" and "Y" could not be solved at all until other men were in their offices to talk business, Orton went back to bed. This time he went to sleep.

He was up betimes in the morning. Whatever might be the effect of his enthusiasm on "X" and "Y," it put so much snap and spring into his movements that none would have suspected it was making up the deficiency between six hours' slumber and what a man ought to have in forty-eight.

Orton learned by telephone from a stenographer that Mr. Rankin of the New Jersey Gasoline Engine Company would be in at ten-fifteen. It was while he was gathering this fact that he noticed a man standing outside the window, looking in at the Rollerton Six.

The man stayed there while Orton found another number in the telephone book. Orton gave him a second look and recog-

nized him. He was the Mr. Jones to whom he had returned one of the twenty checks last night.

As Orton gave the next number to the central operator, Mr. Jones was joined by another man. Orton could not recall his name now, but it was another of the names that had been on the checks. The two began to talk together.

"Yes, Mr.—I didn't quite catch the name—Mr. Orton—this is Mr. Graves," came to him now over the wire. "Why, I'm just going out, but I'll be in at a little after eleven."

"I'm afraid I can't get there after eleven," Orton replied. "How about this afternoon?"

"Have to make it Monday," came the answer. "I'm called over to New York this afternoon, and I'm going from there to Atlantic City over the week-end. Of course, if it's just something you want to order, any one can attend to that for you here."

"But I want to make arrangements about terms on the order," Orton explained, "and I don't want to wait until Monday."

"Well, of course, I'm the only one here who could arrange anything like that. Can't you get here around eleven-thirty?"

"I'll try," Orton agreed.

"If you can, I'll be here anyhow," said Mr. Graves.

Mr. Graves came very near to being all there was of "X." From him Orton wished to purchase the machinery he needed for the shop.

He was a jobber on a magnificent scale, from whom bargains could always be obtained with cash. But he was chary of credit and a total stranger to Orton and Orton's business standing.

Hardy had promised to give Arlene her first lesson at half-past eleven. Therefore he now called up the Atherton home. It was while he waited for the connection that another man stopped in front of the sales-room, studied it a moment, and then walked in.

"Pardon me, are you the boss here?" he asked.

"I guess so," Orton responded.

"Well—how soon can a man get one of those cars delivered to him?"

"Oh, hello," Orton now spoke into the transmitter. "Is Miss Atherton in?" The man waited patiently for his answer. Orton did not have to wait any longer.

"No, sir. She won't be in before one

o'clock, she said. No, sir, I don't know where you could get her. She went out for some shopping, and then she was going to take a lesson in running a car she's getting. Yes, sir, I'll tell her you called."

Orton tried to figure it out. If he could catch Mr. Graves at a very few minutes after eleven, and not take too much time in convincing the man of his responsibility as a debtor, he might get back here by—

"How soon could I get one of those cars if I ordered it now?"

"About a month or a month and a half," Orton grunted.

While he was musing over this, and Orton was trying to get his mind back to the possibilities of connecting with the interview with Graves and the lesson for Arlene, the two ex-purchasers of Rollertons entered.

"How'd you make out with them?" Mr. Jones inquired cryptically.

"With whom?" Orton wanted to know.

"With Rollerton and the other fellow? Last night, I mean. Did you get them bluffed into sending the cars?"

"Why, no," Orton voiced astonishment. "I didn't try. I'm through with them."

"Well, say, I've decided to take mine anyhow," Mr. Jones stated. "That little Six has kind o' spoiled me for anything else. I guess I'll wait for it."

"Yes," spoke up his companion, "I decided I'd renew my order, too."

"Well," Orton snapped disgustedly at what seemed to him hardly less than treachery to his own cause, "I'm not the agent."

"Oh," the stranger now put in, "I thought you were the man. When will the agent be in?"

A moment later they went out, all three together, headed for the post office building, presumably to hurry their orders to Scranton. Under some circumstances Orton would have regretted their going.

Three men preferring to wait for their cars rather than take some other, the three representing five hundred perfectly good dollars amongst them for the agent—it might have made him wish he had been more moderate and less hasty in his rush for liberty from the trammels and injustices of the Rollerton agency.

But it didn't. He had something too much better in his mind.

Right here it might be mentioned that nothing had ever made Hardy Orton regret leaving a company he had worked for. He

had always been thoroughly sick of a company before he left it. Also he had always had something too much better in his mind.

CHAPTER IX.

A RING ON THE STRING.

AT five minutes after eleven that morning, Orton's big "junk car" drew up before the office entrance of the Newark and New York Machinery Company. Orton's enthusiasm had not suffered a bit by the morning's interviews. Four of the men he needed had been seen, and all had shown the utmost readiness to give him cash prices at thirty days.

Only one had consented to sixty day credit. Two had given vague excuses. The man who really knew Orton well had laughed at the request.

"Why, Orton," he had said, "you'll not last sixty days."

"Why not?" Hardy asked in alarm. "It seems to me to work out all right."

"I'm not saying that it couldn't be done," Mr. Rankin explained judiciously. "I'm saying that you won't do it. As soon as you get a real car made and have worked off the novelty of the selling end of the game from the new maker's standpoint, you'll want to do something more exciting. Or you'll blow that hot head of yours off at somebody, and be in trouble that will end a little business like this."

Even the chewing of this morsel of wisdom could not spoil the fact that Orton was getting his thirty days everywhere. For another thing, the heads of the concerns were promising to see that he got his stuff in time.

Mr. Graves had not promised to be in at five minutes after eleven. Orton was given as comfortable a chair as the rather rough office afforded. He waited until twenty minutes after eleven.

Then he realized that he had taken too big chances of mixing his dates. The interview could hardly last less than twenty minutes, might last three times that. And no man living could get anything but a fire engine from Berlin Street through the traffic of Bowery and Market Streets and up Broad to his place in less than five minutes without being pinched.

He lingered in indecision for the five minutes' lee-way. Then he got up and told the stenographer he could wait no longer.

"Why, here comes Mr. Graves, now," she responded. A moment's reflection will remind the reader that it always happens just that way.

And Orton began a hurried statement of his case. He needed a thousand dollars' worth of machinery, approximately. He wanted ninety days to pay for it, though he would take the chance at sixty.

Mr. Graves seldom handled business in such figures. He was one of those keen little speculators who keep track of everything like bankruptcy, removal, and goods not accepted after ordering, buy at less than cost of manufacture, and sell at what they can get. His customers were usually small machinists desiring some new piece to replace an old one or to add to equipment already in their shops.

It would have been a poor place for a man to buy who did not know machinery thoroughly. Though Orton had known of its existence for years, he had never attempted to avail himself of its cut prices. Now he needed all the cuts he could get.

But the life of a business like Graves's is cash. Wherefore—

The clock struck a single little bell just as Orton was telling of his misfortunes with twenty-three automobiles sold in one day, a most ample argument for the future of the business he proposed to launch. He was getting an interested ear. Orton was a talker who had sold automobiles at times when one had to do more than announce immediate delivery to be overwhelmed with orders.

The ring of the clock's bell distracted him. He forgot what he was saying, in remembering that Arlene was due at that moment to enter his shop with a smile on her face and her hands itching to get hold of the wheel of her new car.

"Yes?" Mr. Graves spoke encouragingly.

"Why—er—you see—" For his life Orton could not remember what he had just said. "Could I use your telephone a moment, Mr. Graves?" he asked irrelevantly. "You know, I have an appointment at my shop right now. I want to hold the party a few minutes."

"Certainly," Graves answered, and turned his own attention to some letters on his well worn desk.

"Is Miss Atherton there?" Orton inquired of Miss Stearn.

"No, Mr. Orton," his stenographer replied. "There have been two of the people

who bought cars day before yesterday—they wanted—"

What they wanted interested him little.

"Will you tell Miss Atherton, when she comes, that I'll be back in a minute or two?" he bade the girl, and hung up. He was ready for talk, now that he had found out he was not the only one delinquent in keeping the appointment.

He had now to wait for Mr. Graves to finish his letter. The jobber put it down with a smile and a grunt.

"That's luck for you!" he exclaimed. "You know, I have a set of machinery here just a little different from the ordinary run, and it's stuck to the shop on that account. It would have met your requirements, all right. And it's stuck to the place so long I was going to let you have it on your own terms. And here's a letter from a man who looked it over a month ago—check enclosed and all—for that very outfit.

"Of course I've got plenty of stuff you can use. But it's stuff everybody else can use as well. And you know that we don't ordinarily do anything but cash business, either in buying or selling."

And Orton had to begin all over again. He put into his eloquence the energy of near despair. At five minutes of twelve he quit. He was making no impression.

"I don't believe I'd care to do it," Graves said in a tone which expressed some polite regret and a whole lot of finality.

Orton looked again at the clock.

"Could I telephone once more?" he asked; and added, with a grin to hide his disappointment: "I'll bet you've got me in a scrap with my girl."

He would not have spoken in such familiar terms of her had he reflected that he would immediately afterward mention the name of the lady in the man's presence.

"Is Miss Atherton there yet?" he asked again of Miss Stearn.

"No, she's not here yet. She's been and gone," responded the stenographer. "Just before she went she said I should tell you she had decided not to take the car."

"Oh, Lord!" Orton groaned. "Say, how long ago did she go?"

"About ten minutes."

"Did she say whether she was going home?"

"No, but she looked it. I believe she did order the chauffeur to take her home at that," Miss Stearn informed him.

In his excitement Orton made a third call without asking the privilege of doing so. Also, he forgot the number and gave a wrong one. A man's voice answered.

"Is this Mr. Atherton?" Orton inquired.

"Who?" asked the other voice.

"Mr. Atherton?" Orton repeated. "This is Hardy Orton."

"Whom did you say you wished to speak to?" persisted the other, which is the fashion of some people when it is quite clear that you don't wish to speak to them.

"Mr. Anson F. Atherton—A-t-h-e-r-t-o-n!" Orton shrieked.

"There ain't anybody around here by that name," the enemy concluded. "This is Warren & Co., the shirtwaist people. You must have got the wrong number."

As usual under such circumstances, Central left the wire open while Orton wiggled and pounded the receiver hook, with the result that he got Warren & Co.'s gentleman back four times and all excited. He himself had grown calm with the terrible sort of calm one feels just before a summer tornado.

He got the number right then, and learned that Miss Arlene Atherton had not yet arrived at her home. Desperate, he hit upon the plan of hurrying thither himself to meet her and make the necessary explanations.

"Say, just a moment, Mr. Orton," Mr. Graves now held him. "I've got an outfit which might possibly answer your purpose. There's a twenty-five horse-power Westinghouse motor, a sixteen-foot lathe, a power-drill, a plane, enough pulleys and shafting to run them all, as much belt as you'll probably need.

"Now, as I said, I don't care to consider a deal exactly on a credit basis; but I might consider a proposition in the nature of instalments. You can have the lot at seven hundred and seventy-five dollars, if you'll pay two hundred down, one hundred in thirty days, another in sixty, and the balance at the end of ninety. If you'd like to do that—you might come out into the store-room and look the outfit over."

Orton stared at the man, mystified. The outfit was practically what he had said he wanted at the beginning. Also the instalment plan as outlined was almost exactly the same as he himself had asked for and been refused, after he had given up the hope of getting straight credit. The reversal on Graves's part was mysterious.

It grew more mysterious as Orton looked over the machinery and was surprised to find it better than he had expected to get for a thousand dollars. Then, as he agreed to the deal, he suspected that he had found the answer.

"You know Mr. Atherton, I see," Graves remarked—and it was just previous to signing his name on a receipt that bound the deal.

"Oh, yes. It was his daughter I was just trying to speak to on the 'phone," Orton responded. "Do you know him?"

"Well—in a business way," Graves answered vaguely, as he signed the paper. "I've sold him quite a bit of machinery."

The news that Mr. Atherton had ever bought machinery was lost on Orton as he wondered whether the credit he was getting depended upon the fact of his engagement to Atherton's daughter. Somehow he did not like the idea. That engagement was still a trifle tenuous; and he was not the sort to wish to trade on his girl's name.

However, he had got his machinery. It seemed now that he must go and get the girl all over again.

He lost no time in making his garage. There could be nothing to it now but to take her out to lunch in her own car and spend the better part of the precious afternoon in explaining his morning dereliction and the running of the automobile.

"Mr. Orton," Miss Stearn announced from across the lunch she had arranged on the top of her desk, "there was another man in here to see if you could let him have a Rollerton Six sure in five weeks. I told him you had nothing more to do with them. Was that right?"

Orton sighed at the thought that it *was* right. The thought that Arlene was angry depressed him. The thought that the excuse of business was not generally regarded as satisfactory by most girls depressed him more.* Inability to think up a better excuse than the truth which would sound as plausible as the truth—added more yet to the depression.

In this mood he could not help reflecting that there would have been some money in the Rollerton agency in spite of the deferred deliveries. Thinking of such matters brought him inevitably to the fact that the instalment on the machinery had practically accounted for his last penny up to the time when he could sell his first car.

It was a dangerous condition. Any un-

expected delay, failure to get the credit he wanted from another dealer out of the eight or ten yet to be seen, any of the thousand and one things that may upset a program in some minor detail—would land him on the rocks.

He sighed again. For once he was very near to wishing that he had back a position he had just given up.

Then, as he ran the little Six out of the door, he went through the performance he generally termed tightening up his bearings. He braced his shoulders, threw back his head. This was not the time to get discouraged. This was the time to determine that, if things would not come out right, he would make them come out right.

After all, his discouragement was due to the meeting ahead of him. If only he had some decent excuse—decent from Arlene's viewpoint. If he could carry her some present that would be of a sort to appease her wrath. If—

Suddenly Orton stopped his car. The action was quite automatic. The answer to his problem was before his eyes as it were. It was the one and only answer, the answer he must accept whether he would or not. But it certainly gave him pause all over.

For the answer was written over one of the windows of a small jewelry shop. The sign read, "Diamonds." Of course he made it singular; one diamond was enough.

It was enough to bring the dove of peace fluttering back to the troubled little ark of love. Also it was not merely enough, it was quite essential. A diamond ring was part of being engaged to a girl. If he didn't get it right soon the girl would be wondering why.

Oh, yes, it was the answer. He had to have it.

No, he wouldn't allow himself to think about what it was going to do with his new business venture. He would just trust in Providence or whatever else could be depended upon to take care of feeble-minded children. To consider the expense of it would be disloyal to his love.

CHAPTER X.

THE ORTON CAR.

PANDEMONIUM! At least a corner of the place, with the seven leading racket-making devils trying to make up for the absence of their followers!

It was just the rear room at Hardwick Orton's shop at five o'clock on the morning of Saturday, June 19, the Year of Grace in U. S. A., 1915, and of hell-broken-loose in Europe, as yet the year 1.

In the midst of the roar and howl Herman crawled from under one of the three machines in process of construction. It was the only one with a body on it. The other two were still bare chasses, though their bodies stood apart, ready for putting on.

"There," he pronounced in his thick, Scandinavian voice.

It was the softest spoken word the room had heard in a week. Yet it seemed as if the whole place heard it above the din.

It was the announcement that the Orton Car was an accomplished fact.

In the ensuing moment of silence, while all stood to gaze upon the thing their labor had produced, the shrill voice of a newsboy was borne from the street: "Morning paper—*Star*, *Joinal*, *Woild*, *Moining Star*—New York papers!"

The sound was the warning to Orton not to let the spell of accomplishment end his efforts for more accomplishment. The *Star*, as both the previous evening's papers had done, carried the announcement that the new "Made-in-Newark" car would be on exhibition at the maker's salesroom to-day.

"Push her into the front window," Orton ordered, with an effort to hold his voice down. "And then get that number two chassis cleaned up for 'em to look at."

"Not on your life!" cried Herman's helper. "She's got to ride in."

Orton raised no objection. He believed in enthusiasm on the part of employees. The boy had leaped to the driving seat as he spoke, and already pressed the lever of the electric starter.

As the engine caught, the other two boys climbed into the back. Jim and Artie followed aboard. Even the stolid Herman sheepishly mounted the running-board while the boy gently moved the gear-lever.

Orton glanced at his watch with feelings not very different from those with which somebody always manages to note the time when an infant makes its debut into the world. He still glanced at it with the realization that it was a quarter to six; that but two hours remained for the final dusting off of the completed car and the cleaning up and more tuning up for the chassis that was to stand beside it in the salesroom.

The car was such as to sell itself at the price. By eleven o'clock he had sold the two unfinished cars, could have sold a third if he had wished.

Orton had imagined that the moment of taking the first order for his own make of automobile would be the supreme one of his life. It passed almost unnoticed, since he had the second customer asking questions as the first put his name at the bottom of the order and wrote out his check for the deposit.

He hurried with the checks and one of his own to the bank and drew the money for the men, who would be back during the afternoon to collect their wages. As he saw the blue signs on the telegraph office he thought him to telephone the good news of his thus-far success to Arlene, now in Atlantic City. This thought was father to a seeming inspiration.

What he needed was rest. The thrill was lacking because he was brain and body weary to the breaking point. A day at the shore!

Arlene had already invited him. He would go and tell her the good news of the successful building and sale of the Orton cars. In her pleasure and enthusiasm for what he had done he would find the thrill he had missed.

The men were too tired for more work to-day: to-morrow was Sunday, and though Sundays are not holidays ordinarily with garage men, the machinists engaged in manufacturing want it. All his men but Herman had grumbled at having to work last Sunday.

For two minutes he felt almost as happy as he had hoped he would be feeling at this time. His weariness fell from him. He was ready to undertake the long drive in his big car to Atlantic City; he would have been ready to undertake a drive to Pittsburgh.

Then he remembered. He started to turn back into the bank to draw more money. To take the trip, with due allowances for possible road needs, to have enough spending money to hold up his part in Arlene's particular set, and to get back again, would require a hundred dollars at the very least.

He did not have to look in his check-book to remember the rest. He had not left twenty dollars to his credit; he had allowed only ten in cash for his own personal needs, over and above what he must stop to leave

at the jewelry emporium as the instalment on Arlene's ring.

It flashed upon him that he could easily get another deposit or two on cars for the next delivery. He had fully expected to do so by Monday night. Then came the answer to this idea.

The bank would be closed in half an hour; he could hardly demand specie payment for the deposit with an order; of six men who might be able to cash checks for him five were certainly off for week-end trips, and the sixth probably so.

He simply couldn't go.

Suddenly it seemed to Orton that the whole world was out of joint. The fates were conspiring to make him miserable, to thwart him, to keep from him the little pleasure he might have wherewith to relieve an overworked and dreary life.

He entered the telephone pay-station on Broad Street. Then it occurred to him to save five cents and immediate payment by waiting until he got back to his own office. He clambered aboard his car and ran it back to his place of business.

The familiar sight of the place palled on him, brought to his mind scores of things to be done. He realized that he should use the telephone for not less than half an hour. While some of the men who were supplying him with automobile parts had sent enough for the nine first cars, a few had insisted upon knowing how the first three went before extending his credit for more. These must be informed of the sales made, it was important that they be given definite orders immediately, unless a day or two of delay result.

He was tired, too tired for telephoning, too tired to talk. He went straight to his desk and took down the receiver for the call to Atlantic City. As he got the connection finally established, Miss Stearn was coming toward him about some matter of business. She backed off to wait for him to finish with the 'phone.

His call netted him the information that Miss Arlene Atherton had just gone out. It was the last straw. He hung up the receiver with a muttered imprecation.

"Mr. Orton," Miss Stearns now began, "there was a gentleman here while you were out. He wants a demonstration this afternoon, if possible. I told him there would be no cars ready for two weeks, but he said that would make no difference to him. He liked the car and would wait for it if the

demonstration satisfied. He's coming back at one."

"Oh," Orton fairly cried, "tell him to go to thunder. I'm tired, sick. I wouldn't demonstrate a car if he wanted to take a thousand as fast as we could build them. I'm going home and to bed."

He gave her the money to pay his men. He stalked from the building as if the very suggestion of remaining there were a personal affront.

Perhaps he was as utterly weary as he believed; perhaps he could not have remained to do business. It was very unfortunate.

If he had been able to remain long enough to telephone his orders—or, if he had remained whether able or not, as a lot of business men often had to do—his men could have accomplished considerably more by Monday night than the finishing of the two cars for immediate delivery. Tuesday might have ended with some showing made on the next six cars which were to be got out before there would be money enough to square the thirty-day bills, to get him fairly on his feet for the real start.

It is barely possible that Orton might have whipped things into shape so that he could have taken the trip to Atlantic City on the last Saturday night in June, and have spent the Sunday reviving his spirits and his men's with the day of rest. As it was, Orton having slept the clock twice around, the work was so far behind that he had to keep the whole force on for a fourteen-hour day to gain any hope of catching up with his schedule.

The schedule, however, bade fair to right itself, though the overtime of the men was slicing deep into the profits of those first nine cars. A more serious problem arose in the matter of the bodies of the cars.

These Orton had made up completely by an outside firm. The maker had refused to take orders for more than the first three until it was proven that Orton's ideas of design would give indications of prospective popularity.

When Orton called up the head of the body-making concern his answer threw him into momentary consternation.

"Why didn't you call me up Saturday?" this man demanded. "I held up a fellow with an order for six jitney bodies until night, waiting to hear from you. I called you up twice, but couldn't get you. Now I've taken the jit' order. You'll be lucky

to get your bodies before the end of week after next."

"End of week after next!" Orton screamed in rage. "Man, I've got to have them by Tuesday of that week."

"Well, you'd better try some other maker," the manufacturer replied.

"I can't try any other maker now. It's too late. I've got to get them from you—and I've got to have them on Tuesday, the sixth of July."

"Nothing doing," snapped the other.

"You've got to get them out. Why, man, I must have those cars sold and paid for by Wednesday night. I've got bills to meet with the money. And yours is one of them. If I can't meet them, I'll be bu'sted, broke, bankrupt—and you will have a bunch of unfinished junk to get your share of the money out of."

"Oh, rats," growled the other, "nobody's going to run you into the bankruptcy courts for four or five days' delay in payments. You know that. I'll try—but I can't hold out any hope. I'll get you what I can do."

Orton, who had never been compelled before to miss a discount on a bill, realized that there was little danger of bankruptcy from such brief delay in meeting bills. There might, however, be danger of weakened confidence on the part of some of his creditors.

He dogged that maker of automobile bodies. He called him up every day. He got no better promise than at first. He came to want a better fulfilment than he had wanted at first.

The six next cars had been duly ordered in the first two days of the week. It was in the beginning of the second week that those who had been satisfied with promised delivery on the eighth suddenly discovered that two holidays and a half were coming together on account of the Fourth of July falling on Sunday. They wanted their cars to celebrate that treble holiday.

But the auto-body man remained deaf to entreaties, cajoleries, or threats. Thursday was the best he could do. Orton could take the bodies on Thursday or do without.

Orton came to feel that the manufacturing of automobiles was a pestiferous business. It had kept him from two happy Sundays in the company of his fiancée at the sea-shore. Now it was embroiling him with the men he must sell to and the men from whom he must buy.

And Arlene Atherton helped to draw his vision further from business and toward pleasure. They corresponded frequently—Arlene daily, and Orton almost as bad.

Her invitations became more pressing. Arlene was finding it a bit tiresome to exhibit to her interested and admiring friends a finger-ring and a distinctly second-grade automobile. She wanted to show them the conquest himself. Of course, she also desired to get another look at him on her own part.

He tried, without letting her realize the fact that the visit at this time might easily bankrupt him—tried to explain a little of the necessity of his presence until the business was launched and afloat. He could not quite tell her that leaving his works for two days would probably finish the works, if the expense did not finish him.

To have told her that would have been to let her know how far he was from the financial position necessary to be her fiancé.

Wherefore, Arlene, having been largely trained to the admiration of well-to-do youths who were also in the little-to-do class, became a bit peeved. She wrote him a letter and then edited it so that she got it into half the length of her previous epistles. She did the least editing to that part of the missive which mentioned a Mr. Van Platt whom she had just added to her list of acquaintances.

Orton got that letter on Wednesday, the last day of June. On Thursday he got another. It told of a break-down with the Rollerton car. It rejoiced, however, that Mr. Van Platt had been able to get her a repair man who had quickly got the automobile running again.

It hoped that Orton would manage to spend the Fourth by the sea. It was dying to see him. And it really wished Hardy would meet Mr. Van Platt, since it was sure that the two men would greatly like each other.

Hardy wished he could meet Van Platt himself then. A field of honor and gatling guns would have suited him for the meeting. It was on that Thursday that three of the men who had ordered cars came to renew their insistence that they must have their cars by Saturday night.

Orton vaguely promised to do his best, knowing that his best and his worst were both equal to exactly nothing. The far-off look in his eyes, as he made these promises,

was mentally directed toward Atlantic City, Arlene Atherton, and a certain Mr. Van Platt.

By Friday afternoon it was quite clear that the schedule would be readily met with the exception of the unfinished and unobtainable bodies. The assembling of the six had taken much less time than had been required with the first three. The men knew what to do, experimenting was eliminated, few things had to be done over.

His Friday letter reached him just after lunch. Please read it:

DEAR HARDY:

I thought this afternoon that I was going to have to telegraph you a hurry call for help. The little six broke down again—it seems that the garage man couldn't make a real job of it. And, when I had him telephone to the Rollerton people, they sent back word that they were out of parts, and had guaranteed no car to any such person as yours truly.

But if you don't care to come down, it won't matter now; only, write to them and see that they understand about the guarantee. Mr. Van Platt has loaned me his car, a splendid big Arnold-Benedict, and I can run it just as easily as the little one.

Of course I'll be awfully glad if you should run down over the Fourth and fifth. I really think you ought for your own sake to get acquainted with such men as Mr. Van Platt. He has had such advantages in travel and experience.

Whether you come or not, though, I shall always remain,

Your true love,

ARLENE.

Subtle, wasn't it?

Orton tried to get Mr. Davids, the auto-body maker. He failed.

Then he took one of the boys off the assembling work and bade him wash and polish the big "junk-car."

There might be only a little less than a million things for him to do in the next three days. But Orton was going to Atlantic City.

CHAPTER XI.

THE THING HE HAD FORGOTTEN.

ORTON gave Herman directions for the rest of the day's work and Saturday's, and told him to give the others the double holiday. He hurried back into the sales-room and gave more directions to Miss Stearn:

"I want you to take some checks. One is for the Standard Oil man's bill. Have

him fill up the gasoline tank and the No. 1 and No. 5 oil tanks.

"The check for your wages and the men's I'll date to-morrow. You can go down to the bank in the morning and get the cash. Figure up the time, and pay everybody. If there's any left, put it in the safe.

"Tell inquirers I'll be back Tuesday morning. If any one should want to order, you know how to take his deposit and where he's to sign his name.

"I'm going down to Atlantic City. Don't know where I'll be able to get a room, so I'll call you up in the morning and find out if anything's happened meanwhile."

Orton got aboard the big "junk-car," restored once more to its usual lustrous magnificence. He stopped long enough to pack a couple of grips at his boarding-house and to cash a check for seventy-five dollars at the bank. Then the powerful runabout bore him swiftly down Broad Street and out Clinton Avenue to Elizabeth Avenue—the Lincoln Highway.

Yes, everything would be all right, he told himself, wondering why he had to answer a doubt about it. He had done his best to attend to everything. Of course his business was not organized yet on a basis where it would go of itself while its head made a trip to Europe. Of course a lot of things might happen, and he would suffer the feeling that he might have prevented their happening.

But nothing would happen. It was because he was so utterly tired, so greatly in need of a little rest and recreation, that he felt these misgivings. It showed how great was the need.

And there was Mr. Van Platt, and there was Arlene. A sudden smile softened the lines around his drawn lips. If Mr. Van Platt were really a dangerous rival, Arlene would not have said so much about him. Arlene wanted to see him, and was trying to arouse his jealousy, so that he would come.

Well, she didn't want to see him any worse than he wanted to see her. And he would see her. To-night, possibly, he would be able to make an evening call. To-morrow, surely, he would be riding by her side, jumping big waves with her, teaching her new swimming strokes, or—

Something worth while, something a lot better than standing around and swearing at his help. He shoved his spark up another notch.

Had he forgotten something? It seemed to him as if he had intended to arrange something and had not done it.

"Rats!" he grunted inelegantly. "It's just another indication of the nervous condition I'm getting into. A man never goes anywhere anyhow without thinking he's forgotten something."

And he sparked up another notch.

But one of the showers which happened so frequently last summer spoiled the road for him from midway between Englishtown and Freehold all the way to Tom's River. It was midnight when he reached the shore city. It was nearly two before he could find any quarters and get his car put up at a garage for the night.

"Damn you," he grunted to himself sleepily as he dropped into his bed; "of course you didn't forget anything."

He awoke a little after nine from the soundest sleep he had enjoyed in nearly two weeks, ample proof of the benefits of the salt air. It was almost ten when he telephoned to Newark, and caught Miss Stearn just as she was setting forth for the bank and the money. She and Herman gave him cause for feeling secure that his misgivings had been quite useless.

A man who had already had a demonstration had given an order; the chasses were getting their last touches of aluminum paint; all the engines were running "fine"; the oil man had been attended to. Three of the anxious buyers had come in to know if there was any chance at all of getting their cars by to-morrow morning; but—

"I'm just as well pleased not to have seen them," Orton answered with a laugh. "It seems to me things go better when I'm not around. I'll call up again around noon. If anything serious happens, telegraph me at the Hotel DeBarnegat. I might not be in if you telephone."

Ten minutes later, having assured himself before a glass that his last year's Panama cloth suit really looked just like a new one, and having got his fresh-washed and newly supplied big runabout from the garage, he was swinging his arm to signal vehicles behind of his intention to turn into the pretentious entrance of the Hotel Ritz-Boulevard, when he suddenly changed the gesture with palm reversed as he shoved the brake down hard to prevent collision with a small car just coming out of the gate. Then he stared at the car.

It was a Rollerton Six. In it four girls

were laughing merrily over something one had said.

One of them stopped laughing; then managed to stop the car before it smashed Hardy Orton's fender. And while she did this she uttered a little cry of surprised delight:

"Hardy! Why—Hardy!"

He was out of his car and beside hers in an instant. For another instant the two looked from each other to the girls and other surroundings that prevented a better greeting than the mere clasp of hands. Arlene then spoke:

"It's all off, girls. If any of you wants to drive the car, go ahead. I haven't seen Hardy in almost a month. Oh—pardon me. Mr. Orton, this is Miss Van Platt, and Miss Ethel Van Platt, and Miss Katherine Van Platt." She laughed mischievously. "They are the daughters of the Mr. Van Platt I wrote you about in one of my letters, Hardy. And now you girls can run right along. I'll share my last car-seat with you, but not—" And she looked at Hardy.

"Come on inside for a moment and let's decide what we'll do," she now invited him, while he tried to adjust himself for further shocks, and recalled that several things were still unexplained.

"You said your car was broken down," he told her accusingly.

"Well, it was," she instantly defended herself, though there was a demureness in her face which rather boasted of the trick than apologized for it. "I broke a steering-knuckle dodging a motor-truck last Tuesday. And Mr. Van Platt got a man to try to weld it together again; but it snapped off before we had gone five miles with it. And Mr. Van Platt sent his car out to bring us home when we telephoned his wife the plight we were in.

"And, after the garage man put in a new one, he said I might as well see if I couldn't save the price of it by sending the broken one up to the maker's place. So I had him send it. And they wouldn't make it good.

"But—oh, Hardy, I did want to see you so badly! Was I so dreadfully bad? It seems a year since I left Newark."

When they had greeted each other sufficiently—which was quite considerably—they decided to go for a ride in Orton's junk-car. It was the first ride she had had in the big machine.

Of course there are some beautiful and interesting motor-rides to be taken around

Atlantic City. Anyhow Orton found them beautiful enough and interesting enough, so that it was quite a bit after one when, as they rode back, he paused at his hotel.

"Just a moment," he apologized. "I must telephone and see that everything is all right."

"Well, hurry," she urged. "You've got to teach me to swim this afternoon. And the tide will be just right at three. It will be too soon after lunch if we aren't eating in less than half an hour."

Orton hurried. As he reached the desk of the lobby the clerk called after him.

"Telegram for you, Mr. Orton. It came about twenty minutes after you left." He held up a yellow envelope.

Orton tore the envelope open, his brain reeling a little with a feeling as if he had suddenly been hurled into mid-air and couldn't see where he was coming down. The feeling was not helped a bit as he read.

And instant later he went to the door of an occupied booth and began to plead with a stout, blond lady inside, for the love of high heaven to give him a chance to telephone.

The message had said:

Cannot cash check without identification.
Telephone bank. Will wait there.

EMMA STEARN.

The lady answered his pleas with a withering look, and spoke into the transmitter loudly enough to be heard through the glass doors:

"Say, Edith, is Julia around? Tell her to come to the phone. I want to tell her about the dress Mrs. Reeves was wearing at the dance last night."

Really, all the difference it made was within Orton's breast. The Federal Trust Company of Newark had been shut up just as tight an hour ago as it would be when the blond lady got through telling about Mrs. Reeves's dress, unless she talked right through to ten o'clock on Tuesday morning.

CHAPTER XII.

THE JOY OUT OF LIFE.

IT is probably true that the human mind never forgets anything.

Orton remembered very distinctly that he had made the check payable to Miss Stearn as a slight extra precaution against theft. He remembered that he had intended to

describe her to the paying teller of the bank and to instruct the teller to honor the check. Since he could not remember doing this, it was a safe bet that he had not done it.

It was the only safe bet he could imagine. The longer he waited for the blond lady to finish telephoning, the more things he could think of which might have happened. Most of them had, he quickly found out.

It was Herman who responded to the call and learned, with the difficulty foreigners experience in telephoning, the identity of the calling party. His tone of voice became instantly reproving; it would have seemed insulting from a subordinate, had not the matter of his conversation showed him in such relief by contrast with his co-workers.

"Well, we ban got hell here," he prefaced his narrative; and added, "you ban make one teffil's mess mit everythings."

"Yes?" Orton meekly responded.

"Yes," grunted the Scandinavian. "You don't tell the men I should be foreman; and they was all loafing by the yob."

The chief cause of Herman's grief was out of the box—trying to make half an authority do for a whole one.

"Well, I make you foreman now," Hardy hastily retorted.

"Yaah," growled Herman. "Now you make me foreman they don't ban any men in the shop."

"You didn't fire them?" gasped Orton.

"They fired themselves. All they do after you ban gone is talk how they blow theirselves by the holiday. When they don't get nothing to blow, they was mad; yes?"

"When Miss Stearn don't get back by twelve o'clock they ban mad mit her, und they tank she ban run off with the money. Then she comes back and they are mad mit you. That Yim, he says you was a shoe-string gambler for auto-maker, and now you skip with the money what is left before you go broke yet. And that Artie, he says he would catch you yet and take his pay off your skin.

"And they get so rough Miss Stearn is scared, and I got to send her home mit a taxicab for two dollars. She ban cry and faint. And then the men takes their tools and is gone."

"Gee whizz!" Hardy groaned.

Even as he listened to the disastrous ac-

count of the effect of his absence from his business, his thoughts were upon that which, for the moment, seemed even more disastrous. The lunch with Arlene, the swimming lesson, the dancing to-night, to-morrow's still undefined, but surely joyous programme, Monday—

To have a still teetering business venture go overboard was bad, very bad. But to have his holiday snatched from him just as he had begun to taste its pleasures—well, this seemed to Hardy Orton the plumb limit.

However, he pulled himself together sufficiently to say:

"But it doesn't look as if we could do anything about it before Tuesday. The bodies won't be there; we can't get any men; we—"

"There is three of them bodies come yust before the men left." Herman explained. "The man says his boss has yust took a order for two hundred of them, and is getting yours out of the way so fast as he can. The rest he can't finish already till Thursday, and he sent all he could.

"Und two of them men what has ordered cars was in right after the bodies come, and they want to know why they can't get their cars to-morrow yet. I told them you was by your aunt's funeral, but they said they would cancel their orders if they couldn't get the cars. Funerals is funerals and business is business, one of them says.

"I got two chasses ready. If you could come on, we might put them two bodies on to-night yet. Maybe we get that Yim back, too. He iss a dam' fool, but he can work fast. He boards by my house, and I could see him."

Orton choked. There was no way out of it. He must go back.

"The devil!" he snarled into the transmitter. "I'll get back. You go home and to bed. I'll get there about ten o'clock, and see what we can do with the—"

He finished with an expression of his feelings for automobile bodies and machinists and business generally, too utterly lurid for publication. It was fortunate that the central operator was not "listening in."

"Well, I've got to go," he said to Arlene, as he returned to the car.

"Go—where?" she asked in alarm.

"Home!" It did not sound as if he were speaking of anything sweet.

"Home!" Arlene echoed. "Oh, Hardy!"

Her tone was of stricken reproachfulness. Then, only a little less sadly, she asked, "When?"

"Now," he growled. "I've got to start just as soon as I can and drive like—the dickens or the whole—" Again he choked down one word and replaced it with another—"the whole infernal, confounded business will go to smash."

"But, Hardy—the dance to-night. I wanted you to meet some friends. I wanted—and you were going to teach me to swim this afternoon. Why—you can't go." She was almost in tears.

"Say," he groaned, "you don't feel half as badly about it as I do. Here I've worked and slaved and gone without sleep and meals for a month—and now I can't get off for a couple of days without having the whole gang of men walk out and the people who have given orders threaten to take them back and—everything going to thunder."

"Business!" he uttered the word as if it were the name of the most venomous of serpents. "You might suppose a man with his own business would have about half the liberty of a day laborer. I wish to heaven I'd never gone to sleep the night I had the pipe dream of making automobiles on my own hook! It's making a wreck of me. I'm sick of it."

Some feminine minds are peculiar about business. They get wofully jealous of it because it seems to absorb too much of their lovers' attention. Yet they don't grow a bit enthusiastic over the idea of having their lovers quit it. Arlene suddenly discovered that Hardy really meant what he said. Then—

"Well, business has to come before pleasure," she told him sympathetically. "I suppose we'll have to try to be thankful that you're making such a success of it."

"Success of it!" Orton repeated scornfully. "Oh, yes, it's a howling success. Here, I've put all the money I own into the thing; I've averaged nineteen hours a day working like a hundred-horsepower engine; I've got myself so tired it's a heart-breaking effort to think—all to get things into shape so that, if I quit the works for twenty-four hours, the whole dashed outfit is ready to bust and leave me looking for next week's meals in the bread-line."

"You poor boy!" she spoke soothingly now. "It's awfully hard getting things started. But it won't be so hard after you

get this lot of cars sold and paid for. And you can come down here then and take a whole week's rest."

He laughed bitterly.

"Oh, yes, I'll be able to rest. If this keeps up much longer I'll rest in a padded cell. A lot of difference it will make to me then, whether I'm a car manufacturer or a car cleaner. I'll tell you right now, if I could break half way even, I'd sell out to anybody who could pay me on the installment plan. I'd be ahead at that—ahead of where I will be two months from now."

"Oh, no you wouldn't," Arlene countered, laying her hand on his arm as he brought the car to a standstill with a vicious jerk on the emergency brake.

"Wouldn't I?" he said. "Well—good-by. The Lord knows when I can get down here again."

"Oh, you are going to have lunch before you start," she exclaimed.

"Yes, at the quick-lunch counter on the next block. I haven't time to eat a meal like a human being any more," he answered.

"But you must."

"Yes—I must not. I wish I could. I'm getting indigestion so badly I'll go broke paying doctor's bills if I don't go broke on the business."

"You'll not go broke," she prophesied, an encouraging smile on her face. "We can't get married if you do that."

"Oh, I can get a job where I can earn some money," he replied. "I don't see much hope of our getting married on what I'm making now."

"You'll be making money in a little while," she tried to reassure him. Then, as she gave him a parting kiss, she paused and studied his troubled face a moment.

"Hardy," she suddenly demanded, "how soon will you have this lot of cars off your hands?"

"Friday, I hope," he answered. "If I don't—"

"Well, then, I want you to promise me that you'll spend next week's end with me here. It will do you good; you need it. You've got to have some rest and pleasure. That will give you something to look forward to and be cheerful about, won't it?"

"It would, if I could promise. I can't, Arlene," he answered dolefully.

"Yes you can. You must," she insisted.

"Well, I will if I can—if it isn't a case of going busted entirely. You wouldn't want me to do that?" he said.

"I'll look for you, then," she said, and gave him another parting kiss.

CHAPTER XIII.

THIS WAY OUT.

WHAT was the use?

For five wretched days Orton had been asking that question and getting less answer every time he asked it. If he had not seriously needed a rest when he started for Atlantic City, he had been needing one seriously ever since.

So sore over his spoiled holiday that it almost broke out on him, he had given none of the men but Herman a chance to return to work. Two twelve-hour days of trying to break in new men had not helped his feelings a bit.

The two importunately anxious buyers had annoyed him while he and Herman got their cars ready for them by Sunday noon. They told two or three of their friends, and these came on Monday morning to fight amongst themselves and with Orton for possession of the remaining car for which there was a body finished.

He had endured their remarks until a wrench had slipped in his hand and jammed a finger. Then he had turned his wrath upon them, and two of them canceled their orders. Of the four men who had ordered cars for the next, the third delivery, he had so far only got one who was willing and ready to take advantage of the opportunity to accept delivery immediately. Two were far away on vacation trips. The fourth had been out every time Orton had tried to get him by telephone.

What was the use? The only answer to that query—the only answer that afforded any real satisfaction to Orton—was the hope of getting the remaining three cars finished and off his hands by Friday night, so that he could complete his visit with Arlene over the week-end.

But the bodies, promised for this morning, were not here. He had gone flying to Davids's factory and refused to listen to explanations and said things that had got him ordered out of the place. Incidentally Davids had told him the bodies would be delivered at six that afternoon, and would be the last Orton could ever obtain from him.

He had come back and sent the men home to get some rest in preparation for a

night of work that ought to have been done in the daytime but for Davids's failure to keep his promises. Only one remained, a fellow named Jackson, whose son had come along as his helper. Orton had told him to finish up five minutes' work he was doing on a spark coil.

And now he had sat himself down at his desk for one more revision downward of his expectations. Revising downward the prospects for his business had got to taking the place of much needed sleep with him.

To-morrow he must meet the second payment on his machinery purchased from Mr. Graves, the jobber. Mr. Graves had no reason to expect further business, had not taken the deal eagerly, would not be likely to take any standing off. Foolishly Orton had used the money from the other three cars to pay other bills with earlier dates, but bills that might have been more easily held up. He had expected those bodies on time.

The figures were not attractive. They presented a bare possibility that he would have enough to pay eight dollars a week for his board, a dollar for his laundry, and ten as the instalment on Arlene's ring, until next spring, when he would be able to meet the next increase in demand with about ten cars.

"What's the use?" he cried wretchedly. "I wish to the Lord the infernal outfit would blow up. I wish—"

His wishing was interrupted by the muffled sound of conversation in the other room. He suddenly remembered Jackson and the big hulking son Jackson had brought with him as helper. How much longer would Jackson take, and he have to pay for it, to get a single spark-coil adjusted?

He stalked toward the work-room.

"Aren't you through with that yet?" he snapped. "Or, are you making a new one out of brass wires?"

He got to the side of the car on which the man was expending a minimum of effort with less than a minimum of result. "Why the devil don't you take that wire off the frame before you? Look out!"

Instinctively Orton had realized the short circuiting before the quick buzz of the coil's spring did the trick. The shock of the average spark-coil is insufficient to kill a rat; but it is startling and painful. And Jackson was stooping in a position to lose his balance easily.

He toppled over backward and managed to throw his hand above his head into the spokes of a wheel of the chassis next the one he had been working on. With a groan the man had pulled his arm free. The hand hung limp from the wrist.

Orton's first thought was to do what he could to relieve the pain. He bent over and touched the injured member. Jackson yelled agonizingly.

"Well, do you want a doctor or the hospital?" Orton demanded, a little angered by the man's lack of nerve.

"The hospital," Jackson half groaned and half growled. "I ain't got no money to pay a doctor."

It was at this instant that the hulking boy stepped into the salesroom. Orton did not note his disappearance until he gave up the attempt to lift the father into the "junk-car" for a quick run to St. Michael's Hospital, only five blocks up Central Avenue. The boy did not answer his call.

Orton hurried in search of him, since his renewed efforts only brought fresh groans from Jackson's lips. The youth was just hanging up the telephone receiver.

"The ambulance will be here in a minute," he announced.

"What did you do that for?" Hardy demanded impatiently. "We could have taken him to St. Michael's in a minute."

But the thing was so much after the manner of a fool boy that Orton paid no attention to getting no reply. The ambulance surgeon arrived with his machine in about ten minutes. He made a brief examination.

"Is it broken?" Orton asked solicitously.

"Can't tell. He seems to have some internal pain," the surgeon replied briefly. Jackson had tried to rise, then sunk back with a cry of woe. "Well," the doctor decided, "if he wants to go, I suppose we'd better take him."

The boy accompanied the ambulance on its noisy rush down Broad Street. Orton walked back to his desk and dropped into the chair.

"What," he repeated the question he had been asking himself when interrupted—"What in Heaven's name is the use?"

He was not mourning in sympathy for Jackson's wounds. New Jersey provided by statute a few years back that no injured employee should ever deserve any sympathy. The employer's liability is something to get sympathetic about. But Or-

ton's query was to receive yet other immediate reinforcement.

The man who walked into the place was the one for whom Orton had been telephoning ever since he realized his need of an immediate buyer for one of the cars left by Brant's and Jefferies's cancelations. But he walked with an apologetic manner that was ominous. Orton could not bring himself to speak until he had heard Mr. Peters's request.

"Mr. Orton, I came to ask if you'd mind my canceling my order?" Mr. Peters hurried to explain: "I've just found out that I can get a car immediately. And—"

"I've been trying to get you to tell you I could let you have your car by to-morrow night," Orton interrupted.

Mr. Peters looked crestfallen.

"Is that so?" he said gloomily, "I'm sorry. I suppose then I'll have to— No, I believe I'd rather lose my deposit. This other car's a six and only a hundred dollars more than yours, and—"

"Do you mind telling me what car it is?" Orton asked. It was time to do some diplomatic knocking.

"It's a Rollerton," Peters answered. "I was told a month back that there was no hope of getting them for from thirty to sixty days. If it hadn't been for that, I wouldn't have ordered any other. But it seems that the company has enlarged its plant and is putting out the 1916 cars at a great rate. The agent had this one turned back on him out of twenty-five orders he filled this week. I happened to hear of it, and—"

"Of course," Orton began, "I don't like to knock another car. But—"

"Oh, I know the car," Peters stopped this. "My wife's been riding around Atlantic City in one of them that belongs to Miss Atherton—a friend of hers. And she's so set upon having one that I'd rather lose the fifty than—"

"You won't have to lose it, Mr. Peters," Orton spoke hastily. "Your good will is worth more to us than fifty dollars." And he wrote out another check with a hand that shook badly.

Twenty-five Rollerton Sixes at a clip! Out of the job he had thrown up another agent had already collected more in commissions than he could now hope to clear in two years! What was the use of trying to get into business for one's self?

Mr. Peters was still thanking him, while

Orton was trying to swallow the painful information about those twenty-five Rollertons, when the telephone began to ring.

"Mr. Orton?—This is the City Hospital. Man named Jackson just brought in here—Jackson—J-a-c—Oh, all right. We've got to operate on him immediately. Internal hemorrhages from injury to—

"His wrist? Oh, that's not so bad a matter. Of course, it's broken, but that would be easy. This other thing—we're afraid it's the pelvic bone pressing on the base of the kidneys, or something. It's very doubtful if he'll pull through. I don't know but he'd be lucky if he didn't. He'll never be able to do any work again."

"Good God!" Orton gasped.

"Good-by," the other responded.

Dazed, his eyes unseeing, fixed on a dark spot in the floor, where one of his careless new workmen had spilled some oil, his dizzy head in his hands—Orton did not think; he merely stared, with his brain as uncomprehending as his eyes. Yet, like the unconscious beating of his pulse, one question repeated itself continuously, monotonously in his mind:

"What is the use?"

Suddenly he got up. A glance at the clock showed him he had sat thus over two hours. Like a snapping of an overstretched rubber band, the answer had cracked into his brain.

There was no use. No power under heaven could keep him now from bankruptcy. And it was a case of "the sooner the quicker."

He got out a little book of business information and points of law. Swiftly he read the statement of what constitute criminal acts of bankruptcy.

The scheme that had suggested itself to his brain was within the law. Morally it could hardly be blameworthy. His creditors would get back all their money. It was not his fault that a professedly expert workman did what any ordinary amateur motorist would have avoided and managed to turn a slight shock of electricity into a possibly fatal injury. It was not his fault that a State made fool laws by which he must pay for any fool thing a fool employee wanted to do to himself.

But, if he should disappear for a very few days right at this juncture, a petition to have him adjudged bankrupt would be in the courts, filed by his creditors as surely as he owed them money. Mr. Graves, the

machinery jobber, would waste no time about taking action when his payment was not forthcoming.

It would not take a day for the other creditors to learn of an attachment against Orton's effects. It would take them but a few minutes to start the bankruptcy proceedings against him.

In the end they would find him solvent. His disappearance to recuperate his broken nerves could never be construed as blameworthy. Indeed, it would take little coloring when the proceeding was finished to show him in the light of one whose integrity will compel the sacrifice of his business rather than permit an injury to a creditor.

As for a place to disappear—perhaps he had thought of the place before he thought of disappearing there.

Atlantic City!

CHAPTER XIV.

FRUSTRATED FLIGHT.

ORTON had barely time to make the bank and cash his check for the balance of his money on deposit. This accomplished, he made out the pay envelopes for the men, and took them to the various residences which his new employees had given. He left word or told each of them to await a message from him before returning to work.

All but Herman. With Herman he left the key of the shop. His going must not look like utter flight.

"You may keep your helper and look after any repair work or anything that happens along. I've got to get away for a little while. I am on the verge of nervous prostration. Tell any one that asks that I'll be back in a week or two," he bade the stolid Swede.

"A week or two!" Herman gasped. "But what about them bodies and the men what's coming for their cars?"

"I can't help it," Orton spoke with a weariness in his voice which was fast disappearing. "I can't kill myself."

As he turned away from Herman's puzzled, worried gaze, Orton's face relaxed into a smile. He was off for Atlantic City. Already the weariness was falling from him. He was shedding the burden of his business. He was taking freedom.

A hundred and fifty dollars was in his pocket. He laughed as he thought it was

all he had in the world. He could get a job. Quickly he could prove his abilities. Quickly he would climb. He had been a fool to imagine he could build up a business as fast as he could build up a place for himself in some other man's business.

He was whistling for the first time in a month, as he dressed himself and packed his clothes for the trip. Little danger that the landlady would testify in any court proceedings that his manner was that of a bankrupt who makes money by failure. He was the only one who would suffer by his bankruptcy. If he chose to be cheerful in his suffering—

A rap at the door interrupted his tune.

"Mr. Orton, two gentlemen down-stairs to see you," announced Mrs. Burny's maid of all work.

Orton hurried down, a little apprehensive, a good bit more anxious to get away as quickly as possible. Two men rose in the stuffy little boarding-house parlor as he entered. One was the Jackson youth. The other, a well-dressed, rat-faced little man, began in a belligerent tone:

"Mr. Orton, I am Mr. Joseph Grabstoff. Mr. Jackson has retained me as his attorney to represent him in the matter of settling for the injuries he sustained this morning in your shop."

Orton believed it. He had disliked Jackson from the first. Jackson's attorney seemed appropriate.

"Yes," Grabstoff growled, as if Orton had denied his last assertion; "I am empowered by my client, in view of his family's pressing need of immediate money, to settle all claims for two thousand dollars. You understand, I believe, that he is not likely ever to work again. The operation to save his life leaves him a hopeless cripple."

Orton did some swift thinking. He wanted to do Jackson full justice, as he wanted to do for every other man. While two thousand dollars might not be much compensation for life-crippling, it was all out of proportion to his own responsibility for Jackson's accident.

"Mr. Grabstoff," he said slowly, "you don't suppose I'm fool enough to hand out two thousand dollars without consulting a lawyer of my own, do you? As for your client's needs, I just left his wages at his house. His family would have had to live on that this week anyhow. And he is in the hospital. I'm going away on business. I can't attend to this until—"

"I think I can take the responsibility for settling for a little less, Mr. Orton," the unprepossessing little attorney interrupted hastily. "I have been at pains to explain to Mr. Jackson the expense of carrying the matter into court. It can hardly be necessary for me to tell you that we should sue for at least five times the amount I have already mentioned. But I will accept fifteen hundred and give you full receipt and acquittance, if—"

"I won't do it," Orton snapped.

"I'm willing to see Mr. Jackson and persuade him to accept a thousand. I can be back in an hour," went on the little lawyer.

"You needn't. I won't be here," Orton retorted; and added, "I have no further time for discussing the matter now."

"Oh, you needn't put on such high and mighty airs," blustered the other. "Not with me, sir. I'm more than willing to take this case into the courts. I'm only trying to save you from—"

"Quit it. Good afternoon," Orton snarled. He was thoroughly angry with the fellow's manner. He had been getting into the habit of growing angry easily these days.

"You'll be sorry for this," Mr. Grabstoff snarled over his shoulder, as he caught the glint in Hardy's eyes and made a hasty exit.

Yes, Orton would be sorry, he told himself. He would be sorry, if this hindered his other creditors from getting their just dues. His last thought of sorrow for Jackson's fate had been dissipated.

Then he shrugged his shoulders. It would take time to get Jackson's case into the courts. Probably it would take long enough to settle up the case in bankruptcy. If it didn't—well, it wasn't his fault. They would be better off than if he held on until Jackson got away with a suit for ten thousand.

Once more he turned his eyes forward with the gleam of renewed hope in them. In another week, or less, he would, of course, be connecting up with some job. But work without worry would be play after what he had been through.

"Why, Orton," Arlene exclaimed, when he walked in on her; "how well you're looking. I was afraid this week would pull you down completely. Business must have picked up."

"I'm through with business, Arlene," he announced. "At least, I'm through with at-

tempting to make automobiles on shoe-string capital. I made up my mind to quit while there was enough left to square up my creditors."

"You're—you're not manufacturing automobiles—not any more?" the girl gasped. "You—why, Orton, I thought you had plenty of capital. Why did you give me a motor-car and—such a ring—when you needed money? Why—I could have backed you myself. Father would have backed you. He was saying only yesterday that he'd heard you'd sold nine cars and had orders for three or four more. He said—well, he said that he'd changed his opinion of you."

Orton's face assumed a look more in keeping with that of a worried and fagged business man. Her disapprobation worried him.

"I was losing money all the time. I wouldn't dare ask any one to back me," he confessed solemnly.

"But the thing was bound to go better next year. Couldn't you have held on?" She spoke almost pleadingly. "I could lend you five thousand—ten thousand—even twenty, if it would tide you over the winter. In the spring, with the season's demand waked up again—"

Orton shook his head. Not for an instant had she tempted him. The thought of going back to the rush and worry, the eternal grind of getting work out of men, of getting parts from makers, of smoothing down impatient customers, of having them cancel their orders—all this had worn upon his temperament until it set up an utter revulsion.

He never wanted to see the shop again, would have been glad to know that he never would have to see it. He despised the cheap little cars he had made. He was sick of the whole thing.

"Arlene, it won't go. The makers of parts are as badly behind with their orders as the makers of entire automobiles. You can't imagine what I've been through to get those cars finished that I've sold. I'm sick of it—utterly sick of it."

To cinch his case he told her of the Jackson trouble.

And suddenly he had grown to look sick. The flush in his cheek had come from the long drive and the stimulating relief of knowing it was all over. The thought that she would make him return to it had killed off the flush and left him pale.

"You poor boy," she said, with sudden compassion. "You must stay here until you're better. We'll just lie around on the beach and go in bathing when you feel like it; and you needn't try to stay up for a single evening with me. You must just rest. When you feel better we'll talk about business. We'll have you on your feet with the Orton cars yet."

And again he shook his head. "No, I'm through. I know when I've had enough. I can always get a position, and the experience this summer will help me soon to make it a position of responsibility."

"Now," and Arlene spoke positively, "we're not going to talk about it. You'll be just as anxious to get the business going again as I am to have you after you've had a few days' rest."

Orton did not get better for being in Atlantic City. He remembers those days as a little the dreariest in his life. Arlene forbade him every attempt to turn to the more interesting diversions. She even insisted that, if they went motoring, she drive him in her own little car. They did not go.

Just once he made a feeble effort to get out of the humdrum of sitting on the beach, riding in wheel-chairs, and bathing. He told Arlene he was so much better that he thought he would take her to the dance on Monday evening.

"No," she promptly vetoed. "We won't do that. But, if you're feeling so much better, you get to bed at nine o'clock this evening and sleep till ten to-morrow. Father's going to stay down here all day. And he thinks that the sooner you and he can get together about your situation, the better."

At half past eight that evening Orton began a little session with himself. The question before his assembled faculties and feelings was put in the form of a discussion as to whether he was going to permit his future father-in-law to set him up in business.

As is very often the case in discussions, the question before the house was only a side issue from a more real question kept quietly in the background. The real question was as to his own willingness to remain in the business of making Orton Cars.

And he was not willing. The more he thought about it, the less he thought of it. He had grown sick of the whole thing.

The sun, shimmering across the sea from the horizon, reached the Excelsior Garage

just fifteen minutes ahead of Orton on Tuesday morning. He had used that fifteen minutes to compose a note for Arlene:

MY DARLING GIRL:

Just got a telegram to come home and attend to some of the settlement of the business. Guess I can stand it. I am still of the opinion that there is no use trying to do anything more with the Orton cars. I'd hate to have either you or your father lose any money on them. I've lost enough myself.

There's a good job waiting for me. I'll tell you about it when I see you. I may get back by Saturday. Kiss the waves good-by for me; and think of a few million kisses and believe that I'm wirelessly them to you until next time—next week.

HARDY.

The note certainly stretched the mental reservation thing to the limit. It had been three years since he had received a telegram even remotely fitting the case; he had yet to locate the job that was waiting for him, though he did not doubt he would find it. But Hardy was desperate.

He drove hard, as if in fear that she would pursue him and compel him to come back to interview her father and be put in a position to go on with that business. His early start, good roads, and good luck, brought him into Newark a few minutes after three o'clock.

It was not until the familiar whistle of the traffic officer at Market Street halted him that he really drew a long breath and gave himself the relief of a look from the track before him.

Here he felt safe. Here he began again to hope that he would find his shop's door locked with a notice of attachment pasted to it, or some other legal hindrance to further activities in the loathed place. It was a hope he had almost lost under the terror of Arlene's helpfulness.

Suddenly his eye was arrested by the sight of a man standing on the little raised footway in the middle of the street for waiting trolley-passengers—the "isle of safety." He watched the back of this man until the face was turned slightly. In that interval he had noted that the fellow was standing rather unsteadily, apparently quite the worse for alcohol.

As the man turned he reached up a hand and tossed the cigarette from his mouth. The hand worked excellently, though its wrist was still darkened with the stain of iodine. The face was that of the elder Jackson.

Orton laughed as he drove the remaining blocks. From one swindle he had been spared. He wondered how many had been put over on him during these last months. He wondered as a man may amuse himself with the mistakes that can no longer count. For he was through with the business.

Through with it!

Was he? Orton stared with sinking heart at the open door of his salesroom. Inside two men were walking about the demonstration car. From behind came the clink of a tool dropped on the floor. Arranged along the wall in an even row, almost rubbing hubs, stood three brightly new Orton Cars, their bodies shining defiance against any one who should forbid them to sell themselves.

Herman had managed to see or hear the big runabout as Orton approached. He came forward with a smile that tempted his employer to violence.

"Wall," he greeted Hardy, "what you tank? The men was hollering they want their cars, and me and the boy wasn't doing nothing. So I tank we might just as well get them ready."

"I guess pretty quick them two men comes around again to see if you got back. Four o'clock every afternoon, they been here."

"Und the engines is all here for the next lot and the frames. Already Charley and me has most of the shafts fixed. Und mit the bodies Mr. Davids sends a note yet. I would have sent it if I knew your address."

Herman's countenance had more expression in it than Orton had ever noticed there before. He was pleased with himself, as anxious for a word of approbation as a bird dog that has just retrieved a fowl.

And he deserved it Orton tried to speak it:

"Herman, you're the best man I ever had working for me. I—I wish I could—"

But he was relieved at the interruption now afforded by the approach of the two strangers. He couldn't appreciate what had been done. He could have groaned at the sight of the eager faces of the two men as they asked—

"How soon could we get delivery on these cars?"

Herman had handed him Davids's note. He was mechanically opening it as he tried to think how he might answer the pair of inquirers. The heading of the letter with

the bill for the bodies caught his eye. He had hardly expected Davids to address him again as "Dear Mr. Orton."

He read on, with a word of apology to the two men:

Please pardon me for my abruptness this morning. I imagine the heat had got both of us a bit. I wish to say now that, having concluded a deal for a baking outfit I needed very much but had given up hope of acquiring, I shall be able to get out bodies much more rapidly than heretofore, and will be pleased to undertake to fill any future orders well within any reasonable time specified by you.

Hoping you will forget our little scrap sufficiently to favor me with your future business, I beg to remain,

Very truly yours,

M. K. DAVIDS.

Orton raised his eyes. There was nothing to tell these men but that he could deliver cars within eighteen or twenty days. He intended to add that one of them could take a car away with him then and there. He braced himself to say it all cheerfully, pleasantly.

Then came hope. Into the door hurried the one man who seemed to Orton capable of helping him to get away from business. He was Graves, the machinery jobber, the creditor least likely to stand the delay of another hour.

"Ah, Mr. Orton," he cried, cheerfully. "Feeling better for your little rest? Could I speak to you a moment?"

His eyes swept the two would-be purchasers aside. Mr. Graves was in the habit of dealing with men on his own terms. Probably he had never had a customer before who wanted his terms to be as close as he could make them. Orton stepped aside with him.

"Now, I wanted to speak to you about that little matter of the payments on the machinery."

"Yes?" Orton answered, eagerly.

"I've just been looking over these new cars of yours. My wife is dead set on having a light car to drive herself. And, if you want to give me one of these cars as payment in full, I'll pay you the difference and allow you twenty-five for making the final payment this way a month ahead of time. Your man says you've an extra car there fully equipped and ready to run. Can I have it?"

Orton leaned against a window-seat for support. He wasn't "broke." There wasn't an excuse left for giving up business. He

could put Jackson in jail, if he wished, instead of paying damages. He could get bodies for more cars. Nobody seemed to wish to press him. He could—he must go on.

He took the offer of Mr. Graves, and let Herman drive the car to the man's home. His plant was free and clear—and he loathed it.

He arranged demonstration drives for the two men he had kept waiting. The two who had purchased the remaining finished cars appeared. He had to instruct them in running their cars for the next two hours. Tired, hungry, he returned to his shop and the business he could now keep up. By close economy and hard work there would be little question now of putting the Orton Cars by August first where their maker could safely weather the dull winter by more economy and hard work and—

He dropped weakly into the chair before his desk. There was the mist of real tears in his eyes. In sheer rage he wheeled and stared at the demonstrating car and voiced the bitterness of his soul:

"You confounded little tin cart, you've got me. I wish to Heaven I'd never had the nightmare that dreamed you out. I wish I could run you to the top edge of Tophet and drop you over. I—"

And one more man entered the place.

CHAPTER XV.

CELEBRATING LIBERTY.

"EXCUSE me, Mr. Orton."

It was a brisk voice that spoke. Orton groaned aloud. Had the man not hastened to explain his errand, it is doubtful if he would have received respectful treatment.

"I'm Mr. Barrington, from the New Jersey Engine people." These were the makers of the engines Orton used. They were his heaviest creditors at this moment.

"I expected to send you your check for payment in full to-morrow," Orton said wearily. "Of course, it's a couple of days overdue, but—"

"Oh, that doesn't matter," Barrington assured him suavely. "We're not worrying over that yet. But—we wanted to know if it is true that you contemplate going out of business?"

Orton opened his eyes in surprise. The man seemed a mind-reader. The only living

soul to whom Hardy had breathed his heart's desire was Arlene Atherton.

"What made you think so?" he asked cautiously.

"I hardly know that," the man replied with a smile. "One of the heads of a department in our shop was visiting friends in Atlantic City. I understand that he telephoned in, thinking the matter might be of importance. It just happens that we regard it as important to a degree, without any regard to your indebtedness to the company at the moment."

"Oh, you'll be paid, all right," Orton hastened to say.

"But you really do think of winding up the business?" Barrington persisted, taking his cue from Orton's tone.

"Well, yes," Orton confessed.

"I take it that you're not ahead much, then," the stranger continued. "You are still solvent, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes," Hardy replied. "I'm rather better than that."

"We thought you must be. Of course, we're aware that you have been doing business on a pretty slender margin. If you really want to get out, we were considering taking over the entire plant in settlement of our account, assuming, of course, all other debts. We happen to think seriously of putting out a complete car of our own as a side issue from our engine business. It would provide us with means to maintain steadier trade throughout the year, you see."

Orton saw. It was beginning to dawn upon him that at last a chance was approaching for getting out of the business he was in, a road to liberty, to freedom from care, to the chance to go forth and find himself a position in which he might show his abilities without being hampered by the everlasting dread of responsibilities he was unable to cope with.

"I see," he tried to say non-committally.

"But our people do not feel that they could spend any money beyond our own bill in taking over a business so almost entirely undeveloped as this. We understand that you are about down to the bankruptcy line. As you know, the bankruptcy laws permit you to hold two hundred dollars worth of personal property in this State. I am authorized to offer you that for the business—all money in hand, all cars in stock, patterns, machinery, parts—everything you've got here."

"Two hundred dollars!" Orton echoed in a tone of disgust.

He would take it, take one hundred, take nothing at all, for the sheer joy of being rid of the business; but there might as well be a little more if he could get it by a few moments' dickering.

"Two hundred dollars," the man repeated.

"If you'd say two thousand, I might get interested," Orton tried to bluff.

But Mr. Barrington was used to making deals. Orton would have had to be a more successful bluffer than he was to deceive the man. He picked up the hat he had laid on Orton's desk.

"I see," he said briskly. "We have been misinformed. We thought you were hardly in a position to get half through the winter without going into bankruptcy; that you would realize this right now; that you would take what the law will then allow you and be thankful to save the time."

"But—but—two hundred dollars," Orton spoke pleadingly. "I could have more than that by to-morrow night if I sold the place out at auction."

"Very well," Barrington retorted crisply, with an easy nod. "We're not going to bankrupt you ourselves, you understand. We'll be glad to have you stay in business, if you can make it. It happens that we expected to close a deal for another plant to-night, or I should not have hurried here at this time, to keep you from your supper. Having just got word of your wish to quit, the others asked me to run over here and see you before finally settling the other deal. Sorry to have troubled you. Good night."

He was going—actually going—and taking the chance of liberty with him. Orton gulped twice, then yelled:

"Mr. Barrington!—I'm not sure that I won't take that up. You see, my health hasn't been good this summer. I've got to get away from this worry. I—"

"All right. You won't change your mind now? I'll have the men here to go through the place and make an inventory and go over the books with you by eight o'clock. And if you're anywhere near right about your being able to prove you're solvent we'll put the deal through to-night. Is it settled?" Barrington asked him.

"Oh, I'm game," Orton assured him.

He felt a little shaken by the suddenness of the proceeding. He looked about the salesroom with a dazed sense of unfamiliar-

arity. He wondered if he could be making some tremendous blunder.

Two hundred for a business into which he had not put less than two thousand but two months ago!

But he had lost as much in as little time before. That ten thousand he had started, with five years ago had been more hindrance than help. But for that he would have stayed in the machine end of the business and by now have been the superintendent of some factory.

Well, he would do it now, and do it quicker for the experience he had gained. After all, capital was worth having only as it brought income. Give him a job and he would make the income. If he wouldn't prove himself a ten thousand dollar man in a year, he missed his reckonings.

His misgivings vanished. He had thought to wait until to-morrow for making the start back to Atlantic City. He had thought that he was too much played out for an all-night drive. But he was feeling better by the minute now that he was beginning to realize his freedom from the nightmare of worry through which he had been passing.

He hurried the men who inspected the premises; he led them rapidly over his simply, carelessly kept accounts. Obviously they trusted him to a rather surprising degree. There was no questioning his assertions that he was concealing nothing of the state of affairs. They made short work of an inventory of what he had.

The lawyer they had brought with them was drawing up the bill of sale. Orton looked at the clock. It was only a quarter to eleven.

He believed he would yet start for Atlantic City to-night. It was a shame to waste all the pleasant possibilities of a day in driving alone over uninteresting roads. If one of them could let him have fifty dollars of the two hundred in cash he would go at once.

"I guess I have that much on me," a Mr. Beaver announced, as Orton voiced his desire.

He counted out the money.

"There," the lawyer spoke up as the last ten was laid on the table, "that covers everything."

Signatures were appended. Orton took a check, read it.

He was free—a good bit of a loser, perhaps—but free!

"Well, gentlemen," he said gaily, "I think I'll ask you to excuse me. If you'll tell me which one of you is the proper person to pay for it, I'll take enough gasoline to fill up the tank of my old junk car and head for the sad sea waves."

"Which car is that?"

The questioner had been introduced to Orton as Mr. Schwartz. He had written down the items of the hasty inventory. Orton felt a sudden sinking of his heart as he answered:

"The big runabout. Of course that is not included in this sale. That—"

"It's in the inventory," Mr. Schwartz said coldly.

"Why—why—" Orton's eyes ran hastily around the group and fell upon Barrington. "Why, I told you that it was not included," he said.

Barrington had been nearest him when they were checking up the number of finished and unfinished cars.

"But it's down here," Schwartz insisted, and pointed with his finger to the line in the list which formed a part of the transfer agreement Orton had just signed.

Orton looked from one face to another again. On all he saw the same expression, a look of determination to hold him to the terms of the agreement.

"That car," the oldest and grayest man present remarked, "certainly would be a most serious percentage of the assets of the place, Mr. Orton."

Orton's eyes glistened and he had hard work controlling his voice. "I thought I was dealing with gentlemen," he said bitterly. "Of course that was my mistake."

"And," the oldest man returned calmly, "if I may be permitted to say so, a very slight one for a young man who can make such a mistake as throwing up a business with the chances you had here."

Even the sight of Arlene the following afternoon failed to console him wholly for the loss of the "junk car." Business he had ever taken lightly. That big runabout had been part of his life.

"I made a much better deal of closing out than I expected," he said with a cheerfulness he found difficult to assume. "So I came down to celebrate and blow a little. I had to chuck in the junk car. That really hurt. I'll never be able to get together another one quite like it, I'm afraid. I'll see what I can hire down here for us to ride around in."

Arlene looked at him a bit queerly, he thought.

"Are you sure you can afford to hire a car?" she asked. "Why not use my little Rollerton?"

"Awful thing to admit, Arlene, that I gave you something I don't care to drive myself. But you wanted it, you know. And I guess I can afford to suit myself in a car for this blow-out. There was a big Rivalle down at the garage last week. I'll see if I can't get it."

"Goodness! You must have been making money on the deal!" the girl exclaimed. But she eyed him so peculiarly that he dropped his own gaze.

"It was the first money I *have* made this summer." He spoke with an effort to shift the doubts in her eyes. "Hereafter, when I start a business I'm going to sell it out the day before I start. But—"

"How shall we begin the celebration? You've got to practice a little in helping to spend my money—it's to be your steady job, you know."

"Oh, I can spend money without any practice," she rejoined.

But the smile was only on her lips. She studied him quizzically for an embarrassing sixty seconds before she spoke again. Then her expression had taken on something of what a man might expect to see in the face of a doctor who has made up his mind to operate on a very dear friend.

"If you're really anxious to blow yourself, there's a nice little motor-boat for charter down at the drawbridge. Every time I've seen it go I've been crazy for it. Of course we'll have to take Aunt Jane along—she arrived yesterday afternoon. But she's a good sport and perfectly dippy about motors, so she'll probably spend all her time talking to the captain. It's a regular day cruiser and we'll have all our meals aboard. And I've planned out enough trips to take one a day for a week. Now—are you ready for that?"

"Lead me to it," he answered gamely.

But his throat choked on the words. He made a strong play at clearing it to hide the gulps he could not help.

Arlene had her little car brought around. Half an hour later Orton walked back from the float where he had been interviewing the captain and owner of the Sea Panther.

"We can get it only for four days," he announced in a tone of disappointment. "It's engaged for next week."

He had just succeeded in persuading Captain Pinney to split the difference between two hundred a week and forty dollars a day. He had not needed to persuade himself that he would be called back to Newark and the new job he hadn't found yet at the end of the four days.

He had suddenly resolved to get into tomorrow's mail a number of applications for positions. The signs indicated that he would need a position very speedily on his return.

All the way for ten blocks he thanked his lucky stars that a jewelers' convention was filling the rooms of the Ritz-Boulevard, so that he had been compelled to go back to the De Barnegat. Before he changed his clothes he changed his room from the three-dollar-a-day one he had taken to the two-dollar one, which was the cheapest in the house.

He could hardly remember when he had been so nearly out of money, without some prospect of more in plenty of time. The thought that he was about to give up a check which would reduce him to ten dollars in the bank over and above the forty-odd he still carried in cash was a reflection to send chills of terror through him.

Ten dollars would be the least he could get away with at the hotel. Even the days spent on the yacht could not be entirely without incidental expenses. When he got back to Newark there would be twelve dollars to pay on Arlene's ring.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE JOB HE GOT.

THE long, lean cruiser proved everything Arlene had said about her. She was swift enough to give the zest of speed, comfortable to the point of luxury, of such shallow draft as to go into the out-of-the-way places that always seem the most beautiful. Aunt Jane was a "brick of the first water," Arlene compelled him to acknowledge.

Beside the captain there was another man who looked like a *chef*. Thirty-five dollars a day was cheap for such accommodations.

Out of it all Orton got just one bit of satisfaction. They did not return to Atlantic City in time to go to any of the other places ashore where he might have spent more money.

His conversations had been dull. Arlene's cheerfulness failed to infect him. Her talk

could not drag his mind from the fact that the whole business was eating up dollars that he needed as he had never needed dollars before.

Such a position as he wanted are always to be had. But they are seldom to be had at a moment's notice. What if he should have to wait a week, two weeks, a month? He recalled a time when he had had to wait four months for an agency. He had been able to afford the wait then. But now—he shuddered.

It was after eleven when he got to his room. He had slept hardly at all the previous night. He had traveled far. The salt air had made his brain hazy and his eyes heavy for sleep.

But he pulled off his coat and rolled up the sleeves of his shirt and began to write letters on the hotel stationery. One, two, three—six—he finished a dozen. In some of these he accounted for himself as having given up his agency because he could not get cars fast enough to sell; in others he told of being forced to give up manufacturing on account of difficulty of securing parts.

But the burden of all the letters was the same. He was willing to act as salesman, if any company had use for a salesman; but was amply competent to take charge of any portion of an automobile factory's work, would prefer that to selling in these times, and would be willing to accept so modest a salary as fifty dollars a week.

He took the letters to an all-night drug-store, got stamps on the envelopes, and mailed them before he went to bed at three o'clock in the morning and dropped at once into dreamless sleep.

How he got through the ensuing three days of luxurious pleasure is a matter of which Orton still prefers not to think. During the first he managed to keep up a faint hope that his return to the hotel would find some response to one of the letters he had written to two Philadelphia concerns or the one he had sent to New Brunswick. Through the second he but suffered torture at the thought of what the mails might bring in his absence—until he got back to the hotel and found they had brought nothing.

The third—

"Father's going with us to-day, Hardy," Arlene announced happily. "He says he's going to see how he likes it. He—he told me he might get a boat next year. And—

he said he'd probably tire of it in time to let us have it for—for our honeymoon."

Orton had not time to grow a-tremble before Mr. Anson P. Atherton was heaving into view, his prosperously plump face and figure exuding essence of good-will and good-nature—with barbs in it.

"Hello, Hardy," he began, "I haven't had a chance to congratulate you on your record."

"How's that?" Hardy asked nervously. "Which record?"

And Atherton's laugh boomed forth.

"That's right. I hadn't thought of it. You've made two records, haven't you? One for duration as Arlene's fiancé; the other for speed in getting in and out of business. Arlene's been telling me how well you managed to clear up.

"I must confess you've got me puzzled. I once got into a business and out again in four months. But I didn't come to Atlantic City to blow the profits on a cruise. I stayed home that summer and tried to get back the forty thousand I had lost. You're a wizard, Hardy. You're wise, Arlene. Stick to him. Find out how he does it and tell me."

Arlene's eyes flashed angrily.

"Father," she retorted with the sternness of a good daughter, "if you're going to be mean, you can't ride in our boat at all. You know perfectly well why I gave up the only other man I ever came near getting engaged to. And you know why Hardy gave up his business before he was bankrupt and would leave a lot of bad debts."

"Yes, I know—I guess I know." There was something enigmatic in the bland smile with which he favored Orton. "I won't say another word. By the way, Hardy, have you decided where you're going to start to pry off your next hundred thousand? Er—I beg your pardon. It's none of my business, so long as you don't pry it off me."

He did not make nearly so good a chaperon as Aunt Jane. He had an unfortunate habit of glancing around just in time to stop a caress or an attempt to steal a kiss the fraction of a second before it was accomplished. He said no more about Hardy's business; he gave no more hints as to Arlene's fickleness.

But his face and his words and his laughter were only tolerant. They seemed the outward expression of an inward satisfaction in ability to end things before they had gone too far.

Arlene, however, managed to explain to Hardy about the other one man. Her explanation might have been consoling to jealousy; but it had other elements in it which were disturbing.

"I've intended to tell you about that from the beginning," she said. "I don't want anything between us, to stand in the way of perfect confidence. That affair really was not serious anyhow. The engagement was never announced. I really only gave him a sort of tentative promise. I found out that he had deliberately fooled us as to his financial condition."

"But," Hardy broke in, "I hope you don't think I'm a rich man. I never meant to give that impression."

"No, dear, I know you're not rich. In justice to Charley Russel, I must say he didn't pretend to be really rich. But he did try to make us think he was much better off than he was and that he had prospects which he could have dreamed of only if he had taken opium."

"It wasn't his poverty. It was his bluff that I despised. I never could marry a man who tried to deceive me."

There was a letter waiting for Orton when he got back to the hotel. He tore it open in feverish haste. It bore the name of the Morton Motor Exchange at the top of the envelope.

Orton read with some surprise.

DEAR HARDY:

I happen to be left in charge here while the boss is taking his vacation. I think I've got the only job in this place fit for you; and I'm sorry I need it too badly to part with it. My sixth was born a month ago.

Of course I hope you're not in a position to need the only thing I could offer you. It's only a plain machinist's job—a repair man. I'd make you foreman, if I dared. But our foreman is a nephew of the boss. We hired a man named Jackson the first of the week, and I want to get rid of him at the end of it.

Now, please don't be offended by this. I'd a heap rather slip you a loan of a hundred than give you such a job; but I've been strapped with doctor bills all summer. And, of course, you won't take the place unless you need it. I'll hold it for you until Monday morning, just on the chance that you're really up against it. I know you're hard up, or you wouldn't offer to work for fifty. Sorry I can't bid more than twenty to get you.

Yours with apologies for the proposition,
BILLY MCCORRY.

McCorry had been a machinist in Orton's employ two years before, losing his job

when Orton threw up the agency for the Wilmington Six. Orton smiled affectionately for the man's kindly remembrance. Of course he could not take a twenty-dollar job in a second-hand dealer's establishment. But—

It might do to feed him until he could hear from some of the others, in case no other offer awaited him on his return. He had given his Newark address in each letter, to be used after to-day. He had already told Arlene of his intention to get back home to-morrow.

Arlene saw him off on the Sunday noon train.

"Haven't you decided yet which place you'll take?" she asked, while they waited on the platform. He had vaguely mentioned considering two or three positions.

Orton was thankful that the train pulled in at that moment.

"I just got a letter last night from the Morton Company. I hardly think I'll go in with them, unless there should be a partnership prospect. But I may see them to-morrow before I finally decide," he said.

But even the sunburn after four days on the water could not account for the height of his color as he waved good-by.

The color faded under the tan almost as soon as he had left the station. All the way back to New York he sat and counted the stations, the minutes.

Surely something would be waiting for him at the boarding-house, some letter that had come in last night's mail. It seemed unbelievable that he should really have to take a mechanic's job at a mechanic's pay.

In the hall he seized the one letter that lay upon the hat-rack, the usual post-office of the house. Then he dropped it with a sense of absurd disappointment in the fact that it was a note recently left for another boarder.

Up the stairs he dashed to his room. The house-maid would have carried it thither if anything had arrived last night.

He turned on the light, looked eagerly at the table, at the bureau, at the chiffonier. Then he went back downstairs.

"Mrs. Burny, did any mail come for me?" he asked almost weakly.

"I didn't see any, Mr. Orton. But—I hope you will excuse me for speaking of it. I wouldn't, if it weren't for the fact that I have to pay for the lease the day after to-morrow. I guess you forgot—"

"I beg your pardon," Orton instantly re-

plied. "I did forget. I—" He produced the sixteen dollars for two weeks' board. Mrs. Burney's place at eight dollars a week was too valuable to lose.

But he stared blankly at the walls of his room for a half hour after he got there. He must pay the instalment on Arlene's ring—twelve dollars and a half. He must lay aside two-fifty to add to the last ten in the bank to make it. He would have four dollars left then.

"My God!" he gasped more prayerfully than he had spoken his Maker's name in many a day. "Surely it can't come to this. There'll be something in to-morrow morning's mail. By half past eight to-morrow I'll be thinking I dreamed this. Something must turn up.

"Twenty a week—it won't pay my board and the instalments. But—if the postman doesn't bring something, what—"

The question stayed with him all night. He awoke, haggard, weak. He breakfasted on black coffee. He tried to go back to his room and to stay there until the postman arrived. He could not do it. He sat on the front steps.

The postman was late. Postmen always are on Monday morning. It was a quarter to nine when he swung up the sidewalk along Park Place.

"Anything—anything for Orton?" Hardy was surprised at his own voice. It sounded like a croak.

The postman rapidly fingered the mail for the house.

"Nothing for Orton," he said briskly as he handed the bundle of mail to the maid who had responded to his whistle.

Orton got up in a daze. Slowly he crossed Military Park. He turned across to Halsey at West Park Street. Broad Street seemed too joyously, too flamboyantly busy, too prosperous for him just then.

Its rush of jitneys, belonging to men who could afford their price, scared him; the clang of trolley-cars frightened him. He felt as if he had suddenly become a worm whom anybody might dare to crush. A jobless man without five dollars in the world!

He crossed Market Street so timidly that the traffic-officer gave him a reassuring signal. On down Halsey Street he walked slowly. To ask McCorry for that job seemed the limit of abasement.

At last he reached the place. With an

effort he straightened himself. Something of his old self-confident smile he managed to assume. He would not own to his need until he must.

As he approached the cage in which his one-time employee sat working over his books he cleared his throat to put his question:

"Well, Billy, did you get a man for my job?" He tried to make it sound as if the job were a joke.

"Oh, hello, Hardy," McCorry spoke cordially. "Yes, I did get a man. He said he'd been working for you the past two months and a half. Name's Herman Olaf. I thought any man who could work for you that long would be all right."

"Herman's a good man," Orton managed to say.

The big, dingy shop, in which second-hand cars of all ages and descriptions were ranged in all sorts of positions, seemed to reel around him.

"I hope you didn't mind my making that fool offer," McCorry went on in his friendly exuberance. "I thought after I'd sent it that I oughtn't to have done it. Even if you had been down and out, you could do better than this. You're single, and could take a chauffeur's job in the country, with more money and your board in it."

"I'm much obliged for the offer, Billy," Orton replied steadily. "I thought maybe I could suggest Herman to you—for your job. Glad to see you're doing so well."

"Yes, I made up my mind to stick to one thing as long as there was the thing to stick to. I'd have stuck to you if you hadn't gone out of the game with the Wilingtons. I started in here right after I left you. And I think I'll be able to make the man see me as a partner, if the doctor bills let up a bit now, and I can raise a couple of hundred."

Orton could not walk so steadily as he had talked. Then, quite suddenly, he assumed a sturdier, swifter gait.

A chauffeur's job in the country! Billy had been right. It would be better as the needed stop-gap. Its best feature would be the fact that none in Newark need know what he was doing.

He hurried down Market Street to the office of the *Evening News*. He was in time to hurry his anonymous request for rural employment into the evening's edition.

The second morning found him walking up the vine-covered porch of a big, old-

fashioned house on the edge of Madison. In his fingers he clutched a note in a feminine hand. It bore the signature of Mrs. W. J. Polhemus.

Orton was not as impressed as he had hoped to be by the exterior of the place. He would have had to own that he had been influenced in coming by the fact that W. J. Polhemus was the name that adorned the coping of the second largest gasoline-motor-building establishment in Newark. He hoped that he was going to have a chance to display some of his abilities with motors to Mrs. W. J. Polhemus's husband, if he really were the head of the engine-building concern.

Plainly, this could hardly be the home of a large manufacturer. But it was equally plain that he must remain here for a week at least. He had not car-fare home again. And Mrs. Polhemus's had been the only answer to his advertisement.

Like most men who do not have to worry over small beginnings, Orton had long since adopted the theory that the smallest beginnings are never to be despised; that there is no telling where the humblest work done well may lead.

A slattern maid left him on the porch. He arose and bowed with his best society manner as a large, solemn-visaged old lady came from the door.

"Well," the old lady rewarded him for his effort to put his best foot forward—"well, young man, you seem to have good manners."

CHAPTER XVII.

LANDED AT LEAST.

HARDY ORTON managed to choke something down. It took him a second to think of the perfectly proper response to Mrs. Polhemus's greeting, but he was quite sure he had it as he modestly, but with distinct enunciation, answered:

"Yes, ma'am."

"You look clean and neat," Mrs. Polhemus decided after a little further scrutiny.

Orton clutched at the pillar of the porch and once more replied:

"Yes, ma'am."

"I hope you're honest." The lady's tone hardly equaled the words. She sounded rather as if she regarded that as too much to hope.

"I brought a letter from my last employer," Orton stated. He had no scruples over the fact that he had given himself a fictitious name to sign in the role of his own boss.

He had recommended himself rather highly while he was about it. Mrs. Polhemus eyed him over the top of the letter as she read it.

"Has this Mr. Williamson a telephone?" she demanded.

Orton had provided for some such query. He pointed out that Mr. Williamson stated in the letter his purpose to visit the Panama Exhibition as his reason for discharging so valuable a man.

"Um-m-m," the old lady hummed suspiciously. "Well, you do look honest," she concluded; "and he says you're a willing worker. I certainly hope you're better than the last man we had."

"I'll try, ma'am," Orton asserted.

"You're experienced, he says. Have you ever driven a Ford car?"

"A few times," he answered, repressing a shudder. "Enough to know the controls."

"Well, we always go slowly anyhow," she commented. "You don't drink, do you?" she now inquired.

"No, ma'am," he answered truthfully.

"Or smoke?"

"Er—occasionally," he admitted. She looked as if she were capable of smelling his breath if he attempted to deceive her in the matter.

"Well," she sighed, "as long as you don't smoke in the garage or the house or about the front yard or when driving. And please be careful about your matches."

"Yes, ma'am." Orton wondered how many more times he could answer that way without bursting.

"You have something suitable for a chauffeur's uniform?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, I guess you'll do."

She spoke slowly, as if intending to give herself yet time to think of some forgotten inquiry.

Orton felt glad. After all, her peculiarities were harmless. They were immensely funny. The country would be good for him; the work light. At the worst it would serve to keep him until something else opened up. And, if Mr. Polhemus were *the* W. J. Polhemus, maker of the famous Newark Polhemotor—

"The wages are twelve dollars a week," Mrs. Polhemus was saying.

And Orton stopped being glad. His advertisement had definitely stated that he expected twenty-five dollars a week. He turned a face of consternation upon the woman. This particular peculiarity was anything but harmless.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Polhemus," he said. "I advertised for twenty-five dollars a week. I have never worked for less."

"Oh, that's all nonsense," the lady answered severely, with a brusque gesture which seemed to push the whole matter aside as unworthy of discussion. "I never pay over twelve a week."

Orton thought of the ten cents in his pocket, of the long walk home. He reflected upon the fact that another instalment on Arlene's ring would be due a week from to-day, just as had been the one he had paid this morning before starting on his way.

But he must have more than twelve a week. The instalment on the ring was twelve-fifty.

"Of course, if my board is included, I might consider twenty," he faltered.

"Your board is included. I must say that you're the most gentlemanly appearing young man I've had applying for the position. I'll give you fifteen. That settles that."

Somehow it did. Mrs. Polhemus had favored him with a look that seemed to settle almost everything.

That look was a revelation. Orton suddenly conceived a new feeling for husbands who obey their wives. He had always rather despised such men before. Now he sympathized with them.

It was a revelation of the Polhemus home life. Orton knew that, whether W. J. Polhemus ran or did not run a big motor factory in Newark, Mrs. W. J. Polhemus ran the somewhat down-run place in Green Village. He wondered if any man had ever been told, "That settles it," by Mrs. Polhemus and had the courage to face her and question the settlement.

But, "Good Lord!" he gasped, as he left her to go around, at her bidding, to the kitchen door—"Why! I'm not going to stand for this. The kitchen door! Well—say!"

He paused, turned about to see if the way was clear for escaping a second encounter with the lady of the house. Then

his hand went automatically into his pocket. The dime wouldn't even jingle.

It's a long way from Madison to Newark if you have to walk.

"Might as well get a feed out of it. And—um-m-m—I'd like to find out if it is the Polhemotor Polhemus—Only, of course it isn't. He'd never live in an old place like this. But—"

He went into the kitchen door. Lizzie was the drab maid who had admitted him; also it now appeared that she was the cook. Drab was the word for Lizzie, from her loose-jawed, tired-eyed face to her shoes hanging one-sided over what was left of worn-out heels.

But she was not ill-natured. She looked rather stronger on good-nature than good-housekeeping; she appeared to run to sympathy rather than soap.

"You got the job," she observed, looking him over and bestowing upon him a grin betokening something of the joke on him the job must be. "Well, Gawd help you," she added cheerfully.

"Say," he inquired, falling into her mode of speech, "what kind of a dump is this anyhow?" And Lizzie chuckled appreciatively.

"It don't take you more'n a year or so to give a place the once over, does it?" she exclaimed admiringly. "What do you think of her? Ain't she the bird?"

"She's some class," Orton agreed safely. "Say, what's the boss like?"

"The boss? Ain't you seen what she's like?" Lizzie demanded.

"I mean her husband," Orton explained, laughing.

"Say, what do you suppose he'd be like?" Lizzie answered contemptuously. "He's like a mouse when a cat's been playin' with it for a couple of hours. Mr. Polhemus is like just what she tells him, and no back talk, believe me."

"What does he do?"

"Oh, he's got a factory down in Newark—makes engines for boats and automobeels. They say he's worth about a million, and the old woman won't let him get shaved at a barber's. You don't need to worry none about him. He'll never say a word, so long as she don't. Want to go up to your room?"

So it was the Polhemotor W. J. Polhemus.

"Guess I might as well," Orton decided. In the dingy room to which Lizzie led

him, he set down his suit case. The maid told him where he could find water for the cracked pitcher, and brought him a half-cake of laundry soap. Having decided to wait long enough to see Mr. Polhemus, he took out of his case his overalls and a small kit of tools he had brought along. Mrs. Polhemus had told him he could wash the car after lunch.

He spent the balance of the time allowed him for settling his room in gathering information from Lizzie. All he had to do was to sit around the kitchen and let her talk.

After the lunch, which Lizzie had managed to make pretty fair as a reward for sympathetic listening, he ambled to the garage. His first attempt to start the engine of the little car told him of enough things to do to keep him hustling for some hours. He set about doing them with quite a little enthusiasm.

By half past four he had pretty nearly overhauled the machine, and had got it into fair running condition. He had just finished the adjustment of the carbureter to secure as perfect as possible a hum from the motor, when Mrs. Polhemus appeared in the door.

"What in the world are you doing?" she demanded accusingly. "Are you going to take the whole afternoon to washing that car?"

It appeared that the momentum of her own strong purpose carried her thus far before she even noted the running motor. Then—

"Oh," she corrected herself, "I didn't expect you to get it running. You may as well go down now to the Madison station and meet Mr. Polhemus and save him paying for a cab. He comes on the five-sixteen. You'll just about have time to wash and change your clothes.

"You haven't washed the car at all, have you? Well, you'll have to do that when you get back."

Orton thought better of inquiring just what she had expected him to do, if not to get the car running, or why her tone implied toleration rather than approbation of his having done that. He was too anxious to meet Mr. Polhemus; and much too sure that he would leave the place before night to care what Mrs. Polhemus expected or did not expect.

It seemed to him that he would have known Mr. Polhemus, even if that gentle-

man had not spied his own car and come directly toward it at the station. He was a small man with mutton-chop whiskers and stooped shoulders and a nervous habit of lifting his eyebrows and blinking at the same time, with the result that his glasses were always tumbling off.

"Ah," he said, in a thin voice that sounded asthmatic, "so you're the new chauffeur. And I see, the men have got the car fixed again."

"Why, no, sir; I fixed it up myself," Orton answered, as he bent to crank the engine.

"Did you?" Mr. Polhemus replied with surprise in his voice. "Why—it certainly runs better than I—er—really ever expected it to run. You must have had experience with Ford cars before."

"Oh, I've had experience with almost all kinds. I've always been a garage man before," Orton answered.

"Ah, indeed!" The mild-mannered man raised his brows and lowered his lids and lost his glasses in a sudden access of eagerness—

"You never happened to run across one of our Polhemotors, did you? Probably you'd remember better the name of one of the cars that uses them."

"Oh, I've noticed the engine. It's the one real feature of the Hepton-Wise sixes this year; and it went most of the way to make a car of the Wilfords while they lasted."

"Um-m-m-m—you like them, do you?" Mr. Polhemus seemed immensely pleased.

"They're as good an engine as is to be found in any medium-priced car to-day," Orton answered warmly. He had growing hopes of Mr. Polhemus.

"By the way, what did you say your name is?" the little man asked.

"Hardwick Orton," Hardy told him.

"Not—not—surely not the Orton Car man?" Polhemus gasped.

"I'm the man—I'm sorry to say," Orton responded with a sigh.

"Well, bless my soul! No wonder you could make the car go! And it goes beautifully—I really think it's better than it was when we got it." Mr. Polhemus remained silent for a moment, apparently giving himself up to the pleasure any mechanical-minded man gets out of hearing a machine do its work well.

"But what in the world are you coming out here to take a job like this for?" he sud-

denly demanded. It was the chance Orton wanted.

"Well, I went badly broke on the Orton Car, as you may know. I need money—need it badly. I didn't care to do this sort of thing right in town. I advertised for twenty-five a week, and thought that would be better than the twenty I could get as a common machinist in town. When I got here I hadn't enough to get back again after I found out that the wages are only fifteen."

"Eh? How's that? You advertised for twenty-five a week, you say?"

"Yes, sir," Orton said in a tone that betrayed a little of his indignation. "Naturally, I supposed that any one who sent for me and offered a position without mentioning the contrary would pay me what I advertised for. I shouldn't have come otherwise, of course."

Mr. Polhemus lost his glasses again, and made a noise something like that of a big clock about two minutes before it strikes the hour.

"Well—umh—I'm sorry about that. Of course, Mrs. Polhemus didn't quite understand. Really, this isn't the kind of job for you at all. If I had known you were looking for something—

"But I'll tell you: We won't say anything about it, and I'll just make up the deficit at the end of the week, if you don't mind. I think, in a week or two, something may turn up more in your line. I—I'll talk to you about it later on," he finished hastily, as they turned into the gate of the Polhemus estate and saw that Mrs. Polhemus was waiting on the front porch for their arrival.

"Now, Orton," she addressed her new chauffeur before she greeted her husband, "you may let the washing of the car go till to-morrow. I want you to mow the front lawn before dinner. The mower's in the cellar."

For an instant Orton stared at her in uncompromising amazement. The realization that her husband, who had got out of the car, was eying him, caused him to go on to the garage in silence. As he came back he had opportunity to express his indignation to Lizzie, who was removing some half-washed and wholly dried dish-towels from a clothes-line:

"What do you know about that? She told me to mow the lawn!"

Lizzie laughed.

"I guess you've been workin' for millionaires that keep chauffeurs just to run automobiles. These kind of folks call a ordinary man-of-all-work a chauffeur when they got a auto for him to run on Sunday. See?"

"And you mean to say I'm really expected to mow that lawn as part of my job?" he gasped.

"You bet your neck you are," he was informed; "and trim the hedges and dig the garden and wash windows and beat carpets and 'tend the furnace in winter. You'd milk the cow, if she hadn't gone dry last month and been took to the butcher's. If you think you're gettin' wages just to run that little flivver, you better change your brand o' dope."

Again Orton stood hesitating on the edge of making a hasty exit from the premises. Then he considered Mr. Polhemus, the Polhemotor works, the chances in those works. Mr. Polhemus looked as if he stood up in Sunday School every week and told all the little children that, if they did the little things well they would get the big rewards later on.

"Oh, I guess a week or two of it won't kill me," he decided. Then he got the mower out of the cellar and began to push it around the front lawn and to look as much as he could as if he loved to do it.

After all, he didn't mind doing it so tremendously. And the future— Now he could write Arlene the letter he had not been able to write while the one best bet for the future had looked like nothing at all. After dinner he got down to the epistle.

MY DARLING ARLENE:

I haven't written until I definitely decided about the positions offered. I did not take the offer of the Morton Exchange. I could get no absolute promise of a partnership within certain limits. Of course I could not go into their line on any other basis.

I have accepted a position with Polhemus—the Polhemotor Company man. As soon as I have been tried out a little under the present manager, I expect to get his place. Certainly I have no complaint as to the treatment I am getting.

Mr. Polhemus did not think I was looking up to real form. As I had had no vacation, I was ordered up here to his country place to recuperate. Just landed here this morning. Feel better already.

* * * * *

For the present, address me care W. J. Polhemus, Madison, N. J. I know a place a bit farther south where I'd rather recuperate. Until you come back to Newark, the one really healthy spot for me is Atlantic City. But here I can talk over the business with Mr.

Polhemus evenings, and get a better line on his ideas. So, once more, it's business versus pleasure.

Never mind. As soon as I'm settled in the managership, we'll be able to think a little about a date to put on wedding invitations. For it won't take me long to fix things so that it will be a partnership as well.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CASE OF ENDURANCE.

"WELL, a week or two of it won't kill me."

Just how many times Orton had thought that out in the days and nights that brought him to Sunday afternoon and, instead of the long drive he had expected, utter idleness in conformity to the Puritan standards of the mistress of the house—just how many times and how many ways he had reached that conclusion was more than he could have reckoned.

Two weeks of it or less—especially less—would not kill him. On the strength of that thought he had hoed corn, washed windows, beaten carpets, mowed lawns, trimmed hedges, swept porches—done about all the things he had never dreamed of himself as doing for hire.

And, while he did them, he thought of the factory job ahead.

In a factory he could show what he was worth. Even if he were started as a common mechanic, he would quickly prove his abilities. But Mr. Polhemus would hardly pay him twenty-five dollars now with the expectation of putting him down to a mechanic's wage on the real job that was to be his. It would be a foremanship at least, more likely the head of some department.

And then—Orton could see himself going right up to the top. Superintendent of the factory by the end of a year; a member of the firm in two years. It had been done before in many a business. When a man proved himself invaluable he got things.

In the quiet stillness of that Sabbath afternoon, Mr. Polhemus joined him in the orchard, where Hardy was exercising the privilege of smoking behind the house. He had not talked more than two minutes before he made known why he wished to talk at all.

"By the way," he mentioned casually, it seemed at first, "I was looking over one of your cars yesterday. Mr. Brooks—you may remember selling it to him. Very good

little car for the money, I should say. Why didn't it go?"

And Orton realized that it was his business ability which was being put under cross-examination. He realized it more fully as the question was followed by others; as Mr. Polhemus showed more and more dissatisfaction with the answers, though keeping up the appearance of an entirely impersonal interest. The realization grew painful.

"The truth of the matter," Orton finally explained nervously, "is that my nerves were going to pieces. I was almost a wreck from lack of sleep and worry. It was a case of get out before I was taken out and sent to a sanatorium while the concern went to smash and left my creditors in the lurch. I hadn't time or money to get the business away from being entirely a one-man affair; and the one man was on the edge of a breakdown."

This was his last line in what had become a veritable plea of defense. A genius may get "sick" of a job and drop it with a lot of money; a real business man finds it hard to understand that sort of thing. Orton was finding it hard to explain to a business man.

Viewed in the light of his present position, it was rather hard for him to explain satisfactorily to himself why he had let go so hurriedly and unprofitably. In spite of all his hopes, there had been moments during the four days under Mrs. Polhemus's régime when the hardest hours of his experience as a manufacturer had looked like precious moments of sheer joy.

Orton reddened under Mr. Polhemus's blinking scrutiny. He wished he looked several shades paler.

"It's too bad." The manufacturer of Polhemotors spoke mildly. "Of course one needs a strong constitution to handle business in these days. I should think the work here would soon get you into good shape again."

Orton grasped at the opportunity—or the straw.

"Oh, yes, sir. Of course the main thing was relief from the worry. I had a short vacation at Atlantic City before I came up here. I'll be ready to go back to work any time now."

"I hope so," said Mr. Polhemus. "I am really considering you in connection with a quite responsible position. I was a little afraid that you were—er—stronger on

speed than on endurance. But—I should rather think that, for a young man like you, this job was a pretty good test of endurance. You find it so?"

"Well," Orton said with a cheerfully deprecating smile, "of course it's a trifle out of my line. But I guess it's good for me."

Mr. Polhemus beamed approbation. Orton patted himself on the back for two hours. There had been other times when he felt that he could congratulate himself on saying the right thing at the right time; but he had rarely equaled that last speech.

He chuckled as he thought of his letter to Arlene. If ever a man had bluffed and then made the bluff come true, he had done it. He wrote her another letter full of glowing prospects. If they glowed rather more brightly than the cold facts warranted—well, he might make some more come true. Given his chance—

"The car is certainly running well," Mr. Polhemus observed on the way from the station Monday evening. "You got the rear construction down to-day, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir," Orton answered quietly. It was not the only thing he had done. He ran the car home swiftly.

"Well, well," nervously ejaculated the nominal head of the house; "the place begins to look differently already. I had about made up my mind the only thing to do with this lawn was to plow it up and grow a new one from seed."

Orton had actually won praise from Mrs. Polhemus with his industry on that lawn. It was probably as near to praise as she would ever give to any one who worked for her.

"That's much better—*much* better," she had said. "I think now that you may go and finish that work you wanted to do on the car."

He had chuckled as he worked in the garage. He would have Mrs. Polhemus eating out of his hand in a couple of days.

Mr. Polhemus spent ten or fifteen minutes going over the improved front of his place. He was completely delighted with it. From various snatches of his broken, nervous comments Orton gathered that the house belonged to Mrs. Polhemus, but that Mr. Polhemus had never been very well satisfied with it, and that he had really given his future employer a start toward about all the contentment a man might hope to have in a home he must share with Mrs. Polhemus.

"You're going to run me into a three-hundred-dollar job of painting," the man clucked, looking up at the house. "We'll—ahem—have a real place here yet."

Orton glowed with enthusiasm of his own. He had got interested himself.

"By the way," Mr. Polhemus remarked as he finally turned back to the house, "I shan't be going to the early train to-morrow. I'm having to take a little run to Chicago to-morrow. We'll drive to Morristown and catch the Buffalo train at nine-something."

He found time, in spite of the bustle of packing, to go out into the dewy lawn again in the morning. His pleasure was still very obvious as Orton ran the car to Morristown.

"You know, I've a little scheme which I think ought to work out well in the business," he suddenly switched the subject as they were entering the outskirts of the wealthiest suburb on earth. "My idea is to establish distributing centers wherever we have two or three manufacturers using our engines, with a good man in charge to see that they are installed in a manner to fit the design of the car.

"We have been trying it out two years in Detroit. Cameron started the works there. When we made him manager of the Newark factory we put McSorley in Detroit. The scheme is working so well that we think of extending it. You know Cameron?"

Orton knew Cameron and McSorley well enough to know that neither of them had needed in several years to touch or consider a position that was not worth ten thousand a year. He had heard a rumor that Cameron had been made a director in the Polhemus corporation, and was building a small mansion less than a block from where Arlene lived in Forest Hill.

His heart began to jump. This was the program for him. This was what Mr. Polhemus was planning. More distributing centers! More ten thousand dollar jobs! One of them for Orton!

They had reached the station. Orton attended to the baggage for Mr. Polhemus. The baggagemaster was busy, and the train was already pulling into the station when Orton hurried back to the nervous little man who so thoroughly belied the theory he had enunciated, that one needed a strong constitution for business.

"Thank you. Good-by. I suppose I

shan't know my own home when I get back. Wish I'd had time to arrange for the painting. If I should go on to San Francisco, I'd like to have had it done. But—good-by."

They shook hands warmly, in the clumsy fashion which always happens when two grips have to be got aboard the train, with the parting sandwiched between them. But Orton hardly realized the existence or the need of the little car that bounced him home. He was in the mood to imagine that a stone-boat was a flying-machine; he was riding in the air.

"Young man," Mrs. Polhemus admonished him as he reached the side of the house, where she was vigorously directing Lizzie in scrubbing some willow furniture brought out for the purpose—"young man, don't let me see you driving like that again. I won't have it. I've no money to spend paying for accidents. Don't imagine for a moment that if you're arrested for speeding I'm going to bail you out or pay any fines. I had one chauffeur arrested myself. And he spent three weeks in jail."

Her words had all the chilling effect and none of the afterglow of a dash of cold water. Somehow her half approbation yesterday had given him the notion that he would receive no more scoldings.

"Yes, ma'am," he uttered in a completely crestfallen voice.

"Here's a letter the postman left for you. But I want you to clean the cellar this morning. You've come home in such a hurry that I think you'll have time. You may read the letter after you're finished."

Orton put the letter into his pocket. He bit his lips to keep down an oath. He ran the car on into the garage and took the letter out and read it before returning for further instructions about the cellar.

"She can wait, drat her!" he growled, as he opened the dainty envelope.

MY DEAR OLD SPLENDID BOY:

You can't guess how glad I am. Of course I knew you would get a position right away. I hardly hoped you could find anything so good in so little time.

I just ran right to daddy with the news. He's so mean. He just said, "What, another one! Say, it's some fun trying to keep track of that beau of yours."

But we'll show him. He had to admit that the Polhemus Company was a mighty good one, and that it had lots of opportunities in it. And I've a sort of feeling that this is going to prove the right place for you.

And I know you'll stick to it. The Roller-

ton crowd weren't fit for you to deal with. I've just had some experience with them. I lent the car to the Van Platt girls, and they had an accident with it. It's practically smashed to bits. And the Rollertons refuse to do a thing about it. The girls managed to escape without any serious hurts—all but Ruth, who is wearing a broken arm in a sling.

Now, I don't want you to do anything about it. Don't feel that you must get me another car. Really, I'm rather scared about trying to drive any more. So, if you should get me another car of any kind, I should have to refuse it. I want you to keep your money to put into business. And I want you not even to come to see me, if it should interfere with business in any way.

For I'm sure you're going to land big with this job. I feel it in my bones. Maybe it'll be hard at first—but you won't mind that. I don't care what dad or any one else says; I believe in you, and know that, when you've got the right sort of company back of you, you'll make good. Then we'll show them all; won't we, dear?

Orton's temperament was like a rubber balloon; the higher it was blown up, the easier to prick it and the more complete its collapse.

Five minutes before his inward response to her letter would have been one of enthusiastic assent to every word. Now he recalled the days at Atlantic City when she had administered the rest cure and refused to consider his giving up his business.

"Little sermonette, eh?" he growled now, and the idea spoiled the lighter vein and the tenderer expressions that made up the rest of the letter.

The thought that he would have to take a lecture probably for the time he was using in reading the letter made him cross.

"I guess if she saw me taking that old dame's guff," he grumbled, "she'd cut out this stuff about sticking. You'd think she's trying to bring me up. Darn her old man. It's none of his business how many jobs I hold. I never asked him for any."

The cellar was dark and damp and filled with musty rubbish that had to be got out. Mrs. Polhemus came frequently with her brusque demand as to how he was getting on.

Down there in the gloom everything took on a different aspect. There of all places was wanting the inspiration of the thought that all he did helped favorably to impress Mr. Polhemus. Mr. Polhemus probably would not go into that cellar in two more months; was quite unlikely then to find out whether any one had been supposed to clean it or not.

A window had been broken on one side and boarded up. A gas jet revealed a pile of ancient and molded papers that would make an hour's dirty carrying out and burning. He snapped off the gas as he heard Mrs. Polhemus coming again.

"Did you clean over there?" he woman asked, pointing to the dungeonlike corner.

"Yes, ma'am," he answered promptly, basing the statement on the fact that he had picked up a stray soap-box and hurled it across to the pile of kindling wood on the other side of the cellar.

"Just light that gas again, and let's have a look at it," Mrs. Polhemus commanded. And then—"You don't call that clean? You aren't going to leave that pile of old papers? Why, you haven't even swept the floor."

Orton was furious with the anger every one feels when caught. He began to pull down the stack of papers, hurling them out toward the middle of the cellar in a cloud of dust which brought an instant cry from Mrs. Polhemus:

"Stop that this instant. Don't you know better than to make such a dust as that?"

"No, I don't," he cried in a flare of rage. "I'm no nigger chimneysweep; I'm an automobile driver."

Mrs. Polhemus stiffened a little stiffer than usual—which was fairly stiff; and set her jaw a little tighter than her wont—which was pretty tight—and glared at him.

"Very well," she snapped, "if you don't want to do the work here, I'll get some one that does."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BITTER SIDE OF SWEET REVENGE.

OF course he did not go. Her tone, even more than his own thought, seemed to indicate that the consequences of such a step would be dire. He looked sullenly at her in the dim flare of the gas, until she spoke again:

"Now pick them up carefully and carry them out into the garden and set fire to them where they won't burn any of the trees," she ordered.

As Lizzie had said with reference to Mr. Polhemus, Orton did as he was told without further back talk. But every look and act was carefully carried out to show that he entirely resented having to do what he did.

Somehow he pulled through the rest of the day, but not before he had broken a pane of glass in the cellar-door. At its end he undressed, then stood for a moment looking at the cheap gray blanket folded over the foot of his bed. He had not made a light. The mosquito netting was worn out, and he generally took pains not to light the gas to draw the pestiferous insects into the room.

Suddenly he remembered that the little white patch on the blanket was Arlene's letter. He had dropped it there when he changed his clothes after finishing the cellar job.

"Oh, what's the use?" he inquired mournfully, remembering, too, the veiled hint that he was expected to keep this job and to make good at it.

"Well, to-morrow's pay-day, and I'll have to—"

He had but opened a fresh line for worry. He had not been nice about any of his work to-day, and had done nothing to placate the wrath of his all but implacable employer. To-morrow he would want to get time to take his money to the post-office and mail enough of it to pay for the instalment on Arlene's ring.

The thought of his wages brought another, which caused him to drop dejectedly upon the bed, then to sit bolt upright and face the fact that Mr. Polhemus had gone off without a word about the promised ten dollars with which he was to supplement what Mrs. Polhemus would pay him!

He had got the answer to the question "What's the use?" much more promptly than on that other occasion when he had sat at his own desk in his own salesroom and asked it about his own business. It was the same answer.

The mere fact that he, naturally the most interested party in the matter, had not thought of that ten-dollar addition to his wages until ten or eleven hours after Mr. Polhemus's boarding of the train—this fact bore no weight in his deductions from the whole wretched business.

He knew now that he had been fooled. Mr. Polhemus was simply "stringing him along" with all the promises. There would be no factory job; there would be no extra ten dollars. It was all done to keep him as long as possible.

"But if he thinks I'm going to stand for this place a whole month waiting for his job or that promise of ten per, he's sadly

in need of overhauling his thinker," Orton snapped at the darkness.

He threw himself onto the bed in search of the great surcease of wo. He was tired enough to get to sleep quickly. A great help in getting there was complete determination as to his immediate future course of action. To-morrow Mrs. Polhemus might hunt through the advertising pages of the *Evening News* until she found some other poor devil of a chauffeur to skin.

This decision made it rather easier for him to fulfil her demands during the morning. They were the last things he would do for her. And doing them with an air of cheerful willingness was but the means whereby to secure ready assent to his request for a leave of absence. As for his wages, he hoped she would think to pay him without his asking.

When she failed to do so, it was not reminding her of this that put the deference in his tone as he approached her. He could afford to be deferential. He would get his satisfaction out of thinking of her wait for his return from Madison.

"Mrs. Polhemus," he said, in his best society manner, "I beg your pardon, but could you spare me long enough this afternoon to take my wages to Madison and send a money order. I have a little obligation that has to be met by—"

He had got this far before she could draw breath sufficient for the full expression of her amazement in an astonished echo of the words—

"Your wages!"

"Why—why, yes," he faltered, getting a little amazement of his own. "I began a week ago this morning."

"A week?" she echoed again; "I pay by the month."

"By the month?" he echoed in his turn. Then desperation gave him a little more courage: "You hired me by the week, Mrs. Polhemus," he said very distinctly.

"I always pay by the month," she answered, assuming the tone which with her "settled things."

However, it could not settle things with Orton. He had to have the money.

"You hired me by the week," he repeated. "And I must insist on having my wages that way. I can't work here on any other basis. I'll leave right here and now first."

"And forfeit your wages entirely," Mrs. Polhemus mentioned as a threatful reminder.

"Hardly," he retorted. "I'll have a lawyer here by noon to-morrow to collect my wages—with collection fees. I suppose you thought you could get off with sixty dollars a month instead of sixty-five or seven by paying me that way. You may be able to work that with some men; you can't with me."

He turned on his heel and started off. His going was more than half due to fear that she would frighten him into some concession that she would see and know how scared he was at his own boldness.

Of course, Orton did not know that, at his worst, he was better than anything she was likely to get for the wages she was willing to pay. Nor did he know that she had had one experience which backed his bluff about collecting his wages by law. But Mrs. Polhemus knew.

"Orton, come back here," she commanded.

He merely stopped where he stood and half turned toward her.

"Of course, if you are very much in need of the money, since you understood things that way, I'll pay you fifteen a week, as agreed upon. You're really much too high-priced at that. I've had more competent men at forty-eight a month. You'll certainly have to show vast improvement if I'm to keep you at that."

He stepped back to her, debating inwardly whether to tell her as soon as she had paid the money that he was through, thus giving himself the satisfaction of seeing the result of the announcement; or, to leave her to find it out for herself when he did not return.

"I'll have your money for you Saturday," she told him.

"Saturday?" She had him now. There could be no going to law about payment deferred three days. "But I have to have the money to-day. I've got to meet a bill in Newark with it to-morrow. It won't get there if I don't send it off. I—"

He quit in despair.

"I don't really see that I have anything to do with your obligations, Orton," she said with pompous frigidity. "It is really quite impossible for me to pay you before Saturday. You'll have to arrange things accordingly. Please get into your overalls and come out to the garden. We must get some late peas planted this afternoon."

Necessity is the mother of invention. So unaccustomed was he to any need for per-

sonal borrowing that the idea of it seemed to him a veritable inspiration. To make use of business credit based on trade given and thoroughly secured was one thing; the only manner in which he could think of appealing for a personal loan was by offering some one a bonus that would tempt.

He picked Herman Olaf as the victim most likely to be tempted. He wrote his note "On Demand" for thirteen dollars and begged Herman in a long letter to pay twelve dollars and a half to the jeweler for him before Thursday noon. He promised to get off a money order for the thirteen dollars on Saturday. Herman could pocket the fifty cents for the accommodation.

"I've been fool enough," he explained, "to hire as a chauffeur to an old hen up here, who's holding my wages up half of next week to keep me from leaving her."

He put the letter and note into the last stamped envelope but one he possessed, and enclosed his last post-card with the request that Herman write him if it was all right. Then, very quietly, he slipped down-stairs, assured himself that Mrs. Polhemus was in the garden, walked out at the front door and started for Madison.

When he got back he defiantly told the mistress of the house why he had gone. He added that he might have made much shorter work of it, of course, if she were not so utterly afraid to let him use her car.

He was a good bit surprised that she did not berate him roundly. He was further surprised to note a distinct change in the treatment she gave him over Thursday and Friday. While Mrs. Polhemus would never treat a servant like a human being, her scoldings became more moderate.

Herman's answer to his card relieved him on Friday morning. "It is all right. Herman Olaf," the big Swede had carefully and laboriously indited.

By Saturday morning Orton was a good bit on the fence as to what he would do, inclined to doubt if he had not misjudged Polhemus, to wonder if he ought not to put up with things until the "boss" got back.

Mrs. Polhemus had him drive her to Madison. She attended to some shopping. She stopped a moment at the office of MacKenzie, the painter, whose man had put new panes in the cellar door on Thursday.

"Now the bank," she bade him. "I'll give you your money, and you'll have time to send a money-order while I do some marketing."

She came out of the bank, however, with a slight change of program. "Go straight over to the post-office. I'll telephone for whatever I need. You can send your money-order. I'll wait for you."

As she spoke, she was counting out his money. A single quarter with the bills gave him a sense of dizzy wonder if she could possibly be adding a tip. Then, as he carelessly glanced at the money, she explained it.

"Mr. Mackenzie's bill is a dollar fifty. But I decided to let you off with only half of that. So there are fourteen dollars and a quarter."

Just for a moment Orton's head swam. A wild desire to throw that quarter into her face was only repressed by the thought of the quick arrest it would lead to.

For an instant he was on the point of climbing out of the car and walking straight away from her. Then there came to his mind the inspiration for revenge.

Gone was every thought of Mr. Polhemus's intentions with regard to him. Gone was worry lest he should fail to get the necessary money on Arlene's ring. He had discovered how easily he could borrow.

One great, glad thought throbbed through a brain which seemed to make most of his vision red. Revenge—sweet revenge!

He entered the post-office solely to keep her from suspecting his purpose. When he came out, her "Home, Orton," was music in his ears. Carefully, with that slow, fifteen-mile gait which she insisted upon, he drove her across the railroad, up the hill, out of Madison.

Mrs. Polhemus leaned back in the cushions as comfortably as is possible in the car she owned. She closed her eyes, the habit of those who enjoy introspection more than the best view to be had outside themselves. Probably she was contemplating her vast charity in making Orton pay only half for the damaged window.

Suddenly she felt a jolt and a forward lurch. A glance showed her that, instead of turning to the right, Orton had turned to the left. She felt sickened, terrified by the blurr the sudden speed made of the landscape.

"Orton," she cried, retaining her usual sternness of voice in spite of the moment's fear. "Orton, stop this instant. Where—what are you doing?"

The only reply was a slight rising of the motor's hum as Orton advanced the spark a

little, and the car shot down a grade at sickening speed.

"Orton!" she shouted, putting a world of fearsome threat into her tone. "*What are you doing? Stop! Stop! I say.*"

Orton stopped. He had come only a mile. If he went any farther he would be close to the next house. He got out.

"What are you doing? What's the matter? What are you trying to do?"

"I was just trying to get to a good place to leave you, Mrs. Polhemus," Orton spoke suavely, bowing low, his throat bursting to laugh. "I'm not sure but I'd prefer to leave you in the subcellar of Tophet; but—I'm leaving you here. Good morning, Ma'a-a-a-a-am—and good-by."

He pressed his hand to his heart and swept the ground with his cap in a mocking bow. Before she had caught her breath to shout after him, he had leaped the bordering fence and disappeared into the thicket that lined the road.

Paralleling this to the nearest bend, he came out again into the highway and started for the Polhemus residence at a dog trot. He could imagine he heard his employer of a moment ago. Such exclamations as—

"Utter impertinence! Brazen impudence! Outrage! Insult!"

The imagining was music. It speeded his feet as pleasurable excitement had always seemed automatically to speed any car he drove.

He lost no time in packing his suit-case. That operation had been done several days ago, and but partly undone since. On the way out of the house he ran into Lizzie.

"Good-by, Liz," he cried gaily. "I'm off."

"Where's she?" Lizzie inquired.

"About a mile down the road to Lord-knows-where," he shouted, as he ran on down the walk to the gate.

He was happy. The woman was three days ahead of him in the matter of wages. The thought of her plight was worth any three days' work he had ever done.

Maybe Polhemus had imagined he would stay because he had been promised an extra ten a week which was not forthcoming. Maybe the poor husband had thought he could save himself by handing out those vague hints of a factory position. Polhemus would find out, as his wife was now learning.

His own immediate future? Well, Herman was not the only one who would be perfectly willing to lend him a little money

when he needed it. Besides, an ordinary garage job at machinist's wages, a job at washing cars and sweeping the floors of a repair-shop—any old job in the world would be as good as the one he was leaving.

Arlene? What would she say? It would not take much twisting of his previous story to bring it near enough the truth so that she would realize how impossible it had been for him to endure another day of such humiliation and servility as was the price of keeping the place with Mrs. Polhemus.

He had almost reached the top of the hill that descends to the Madison station, when a messenger boy rode toward him on a bicycle.

"Hello, Orton," said the boy, dismounting. Hardy had chatted with the youngster two or three times while waiting Polhemus's train at the station. "I've got a telegram for you here. There's another for your old lady boss, but you can have yours. Five jitneys, please."

Orton handed over a quarter, then tore open the yellow envelope. The message was dated from Cleveland.

"Charley tried to telephone them up to the house, but that poor simp of a hired girl up there couldn't seem to get 'em straight," the boy rattled on.

But Orton was reading:

Get hundred dollars from my wife. Catch first express prepared take charge distributing center here immediately. Come Continental Hotel.

W. J. POLHEMUS.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DESCENT.

"**T**HAT Mi'ss Polhemus is a lu-lu, ain't she?" the boy was saying. "I think I'd like to work for her. Last time I took a telegram up there, her clocks was all half an hour fast. I showed her my watch, but she said I'd took too long getting there anyhow, and she'd put down her own time. Maybe I'd got it from the boss if I hadn't rode like hell and got back to the office fifteen minutes ahead of what she put in the book."

"Oh, shut up and get out," Orton snarled. His brain had suddenly gone whirling with schemes for getting to Cleveland.

He stood there for ten minutes after the boy had gone. For one of those minutes he had been on the point of rushing back to

Mrs. Polhemus. His efforts were futile, to think of any possible excuse for his conduct, save the true one that would only add insult to injury.

The rest of the time he spent guessing whom he could strike for a loan of enough to get him to Cleveland. He got back to Herman. Then he reflected that Mrs. Polhemus would lose little time in answering her telegram. He could never square things with her husband.

He resumed his walk. For what would have been an ordinary block in town, his step dragged, his shoulders drooped, his suit-case seemed a great weight.

But he was free from another irksome, impossible job. Not even the price he had paid for that freedom could long hold him depressed. He had thrown off the shackles of the known; he faced that unknown which forever lured him with promises of his own imagining.

"Aw, piffel!" he grunted; "who wants to go to Cleveland? It's too thundering far from Broad and Market—and Forest Hill."

He squared his shoulders, quickened his step, his face toward the future. He was a genius; the future never worries a real genius. It is only the immediate present that irks. And Orton had shed the irksome bondage of the present.

He knew he was a genius. Had he doubted it, Mr. Polhemus's quickness in arranging to put him in a place of responsibility would have removed the doubt. If Mr. Polhemus desired him, others would.

As he descended to the sidewalk from the Broad Street station most of those abroad were wearing the wilted appearance of those who have lived half through a hot and humid day. Orton struck a brisk pace down the street, busy enough, though most of its stores and shops were closed for the half holiday.

Flying jitneys, clanging cars, taxis, people, trucks, carriages, touring-cars and runabouts, more people, noise, confusion, hurry, and perspiration—all the sights and sounds of the main thoroughfare of a big city—went like wine to his head. It was home, it was life—his life, as yet unmade, and more interesting for being unmade.

He swung along down the wide sidewalk, eyes sparkling, nostrils dilated, a fine contrast to the wilted humanity about him—down to the library, down the side of Washington Park to Central Avenue—

There he paused, waiting for a break in the rush of traffic, so that he might cross. His eyes swept the other side of the street, the other garages there, the garage that had been his and still bore his name, and the name of the car he had made.

The door was open wide. In it stood a brisk, prosperous-looking man of thirty-five, whom Orton did not know; a man with the air of proprietorship about him. Otherwise the place seemed as Orton had left it. In the window was a bright, brand-new Orton Car, with the very sign Orton had set up before the first car he had produced.

The last time he had seen the place he had wished only that he might never look at it again. Now the sight of it induced a sudden utter home-sickness.

Three weeks ago he had owned that place; his name had meant himself, not a mere brand. And now—

The thing seemed impossible. For ten days he had been taking the orders of a shrewish woman, obeying them, answering them in the language and the tone and the manner of a domestic servant. He had thirteen dollars and some cents in his pockets now, and twelve and a half of that was to be paid to-night to a man who had been one of his own hired machinists and now could play his banker!

He was wilted, perspiring, as he ascended the steps of Mrs. Burney's place a block and a half away. Mrs. Burney had let his room; he had told her not to hold it for him. For the present her only vacancy was the hall-room on the top floor.

A kindly soul was Mrs. Burney; but she had to make her living out of the board of her people. She deduced things from the lack of aplomb with which Orton had asked about his room, from the almost humble readiness with which he accepted the much inferior accommodations she could give him. She would not press him for payment to-day or to-morrow; but she hoped he would remember that her terms were strictly "in advance." If he didn't by to-morrow night she would have to remind him.

In spite of the fact that the window had been open, the room was stiflingly hot and stuffy. Left alone, Orton removed his coat and collar. He felt an absurd, childish longing for something as comforting as a mother's knee on which to lay his head.

Of course, nerves and an empty stomach had a lot to do with it all. He had missed his lunch, forgotten it. He did not think

of it through the rest of the afternoon. He just sat there and looked out of the one window upon the unsightly rear yard of Mrs. Burney's house, and the more unsightly yard of the house that fronted on Park Street, around the corner.

Dinner, with plenty of coffee, and the greetings of the other regular boarders, helped revive him a bit. His visit to Herman Olaf's home on Summit Street cheered him more. Herman possessed the Old World deference of a mechanic for an employer, even while he quite humbly offered the employer financial aid.

"Never mind about that money yust now yet, till you got something. Me, I have a goot yob. Maybe, by-and-by, you get another shop, and I work by you again. I ban like overtime. Now, that's what I ain't got."

Orton paid Mrs. Burney the six dollars she charged for the hall-room with board.

Herman had delicately mentioned:

"I ban hear that Yohnson's garage wants a man yet; but you wouldn't want no yob like that—no. Only, maybe, a few days or so, while you look for a place, eh?"

By noon of the next day Orton had a job as a machinist in a garage. It was not Johnson's place. Johnson had realized the difficulties which would arise from having as an employee one with whom he had associated on terms of equality. Rabin, owner of the Quality Garage, had never done much associating with any of the employing class.

The quality of the place was all in the name. Rabin's attempt to run an independent garage was as much a "shoe-string" venture as had been Orton's plunge into manufacturing. His machinists knew little of their trade, and got little of the pay the trade was supposed to receive. It was because Rabin was utterly stuck for a solution of the problem of two old cars brought into his place that he agreed to take on Orton at fifty cents an hour.

In the third evening Rabin attempted to cheat Orton on his time, then, after the argument was concluded to his discomfiture, blandly offered a partnership in the business. Orton was not interested. The job was over.

Three days were lost before he found another place. It lasted him only over the Sunday rush, and the extra work of Monday and Tuesday consequent upon heavy use of cars.

It was at the end of the first day's work on this job that he wrote to Arlene. He had remained undecided whether to tell her of throwing up the Polhemus place or not.

At one moment he considered it only manly and fair to explain that he had lost his money, and to offer her her liberty. At the next he knew that he had never had money in her sense of the word; that she had accepted him as a comparatively poor man. And then hope would revive that something must speedily turn up to enable him to regain at least as much as he had lost, and to start him toward the real wealth of which he had always dreamed.

Even then, he thought at times, it was unfair to her to deceive her about his position, to keep her thinking that he was still working for Mr. Polhemus. Again, he considered the attitude her letters had indicated toward the frequency of his changes.

Yet again, he would grow half angry with her and with himself at being afraid to tell her the truth. Much as he loved her, he had no intention to let her become in any sense his master, to tell him what job he must keep or what not.

Yet he did not tell her he had left Polhemus. He managed to draw out quite a letter on news of a purely personal sort. In the matter of his business affairs, he wrote only:

My little period of rustication is ended. I got back to Newark last Saturday. Now it's the shop—and you can depend on me to do my very blankety-blankest best to make good.

Have been fearfully busy, or you would not have suffered this terrible neglect. Don't imagine that I'm getting business so badly on the brain that there is no room in it for the little woman who is the inspiration of every effort. Only I have not had time to write.

* * * * *

His hope was still alive that, before she should return to the city, he would have found himself a berth which would more than excuse his leaving Polhemus. Between jobs he was seeing men who had the giving of such positions as he now desired. He had dozens of letters out for such places.

As the month of August went by without anything more tangible than these on which to found a hope, he still wrote desperately of the place at Polhemus's as if it were his own. He reached the point where he was consciously bluffing completely, where he boasted of things for which there was not even a hope by way of foundation.

The jobs grew to be of shorter duration, the periods of seeking longer. Two things remained constant—twelve dollars and a half to be paid each Thursday on Arlene's ring, six dollars for board. Herman still bade him wait about the little loan he had made; but Herman's bidding was growing less insistent. Orton borrowed from other friends, but found it usually so unpleasant that he tried not to repeat it a second time with the same person.

Then came the day when four attempts to raise a needed five dollars failed dismally. And Orton went with a piece of jewelry to a pawnshop. In the middle of September the Athertons returned.

Orton had always kept a liberal wardrobe, after the fashion of young men with bountiful incomes. The higher-grade pawnbrokers on Academy and Bank Streets would not take clothing; but there were places up Springfield Avenue where a man could pawn his shoes.

He had already begun to visit these places when the necessity arose for renewing his visits to the Atherton home in Forest Hill. Some of the articles he redeemed after a few days of work. Some he left for the long future, and kept the dollar or dollar and a half apiece he had raised on suits which had cost him thirty and forty dollars.

Slowly but surely the conviction was being forced upon him that he was keeping up a bluff that could not carry him through. Slowly he was losing the hopefulness that had been essential to enable him to bluff, since he was naturally too honest to fool others much beyond the extent to which he fooled himself.

He had moments now when he found himself thinking of the possibilities of urging a hastier marriage upon Arlene, an elopement even, if necessary. Arlene had the money which could set him up in some business. After all there were plenty of partnerships in which one partner furnished the money and the other the brains and energy.

He put away such thoughts. The tempter that placed them in his mind could not get him away from a feeling that the thing would be caddish. Yet the thoughts returned with growing frequency.

He was man enough so that the temptation made little appeal when it came upon him after a hard day's work, or even after the still harder days of futile search for work. But it got to flashing its message to

his brain in the tête-à-têtes when her eyes were looking into his, in the moments when his lips were touching hers in greeting and parting, and the warmth of her hand and the fragrance of her hair fanned into impatient flame the desire to have and to hold her his own.

It was at such times the thought that her money and his abilities would end his difficulties and bring immediate happiness to both of them was a thought that tempted, indeed.

CHAPTER XXI.

NEMESIS.

ON the last Tuesday but one in September Orton had secured another temporary position that might carry him over Thursday or Friday without going to pieces. The realization of the fact that what he had in hand, with the wages that would be due him by Thursday noon, would be two dollars short of the needed amount for the ring instalment, sent him for another inspection of his depleted wardrobe.

He picked his evening suit as the morrow's companion on the journey up Springfield Avenue. It was still warm enough, and Forest Hill regards itself as sufficiently suburban to permit of his wearing serge and flannel for informal evenings. Having selected the next victim to offer the pawnbroker, he walked up to Forest Hill.

"Oh, Hardy, I've news for you," Arlene cried, as they met at the door. "Father's relenting."

Orton had seen little of Mr. Atherton since he and Arlene had come back from the shore. When they had met, he had received the same bluffly good-natured treatment as ever—and the same veiled hints that the wealthy man still refused and would continue to refuse to consider Orton seriously as a prospective son-in-law.

"How's that?" Orton asked.

"We're to have an announcement dinner—just a little informal affair—on Thursday evening. He's going to invite a friend or two of his, and I may have any one I like. Isn't it like him to decide on such a thing, and want it over with all of a sudden?"

"But I'm satisfied. He's kicked about publishing the engagement in any way before. Only last week I tried to talk him into the idea of letting us get married before you get a quarter interest in the Pol-

hemotor Company—or to buy you the interest for a wedding present—

"Oh, yes, I did. Why not? I think he ought to. Maybe he intends to do it now. But he went away up in the air about it the other day. But now—"

Arlene broke off in a manner to indicate her idea that now everything was turning out for the best. And Hardy Orton suddenly began to wonder if he might not keep up the bluff until Atherton really had arranged for setting him up in business.

No, he would not urge haste in marriage. But, if Arlene were anxious, if her father seemed no longer to object, and even hinted at helping things along by financing his son-in-law-to-be into real business—he would not stand upon any absurd sentiment against the mere appearance of "marrying a meal ticket."

Of course the need of evening clothes for Thursday prevented their being pawned on Wednesday. The flannels went instead, supplemented with a business suit he had not bothered to take before, since it could not possibly bring him a dollar.

Orton worked in a garage all day Thursday, and lived in the clouds. At last he could see some hope. Soon—perhaps to-night—he would know the future prospects. Certainly Mr. Anson P. Atherton had no intention of publicly engaging his daughter to a man utterly at sea with regard to the future.

To-night he would know. Perhaps he would not know all, would not be told just what Atherton intended to do. But he would know enough from his future father-in-law's attitude toward him. And the very fact that to-night was to be, was really evidence enough as to the attitude.

He got off early. It takes a long time to get oneself cleaned up for a social event after a day in a garage. The day had passed when Orton could turn his hands over to the gentle mercies of a manicure-lady while a barber painlessly removed the day's growth of beard. But he managed at length to achieve the appearance of a gentleman.

Arlene, who had been "out" three years, and whose mother had died in giving her birth, was used to playing hostess. Two or three couples of her few invited friends had arrived ahead of Orton. She tore herself from their midst to snatch him from the hands of the maid at the door and to carry him off for a moment to whisper in his ear:

"Father's going to have a talk with you this evening. I—I was talking to him this morning again about letting us get married, and at least letting me put my own money into business for you. And he said he thought we'd be able to settle everything after he'd seen you to-night."

She was beautifully gowned; her eyes sparkled with that glow of life and pleasure in being the center and hostess of a gathering which a woman loses only when she has become truly old. Orton seized her in his arms.

"You darling," he murmured, love, joy, pride in her beauty, admiration—in his voice. "But I'd never let you or your father do a thing for me, if it weren't that it'll enable us to get married a little sooner. I've been wanting you for four years, Arlene. I'll do almost anything to save waiting much longer for you."

He meant just that. She led him into the little circle of her friends, introduced him to one or two. Others came. Mr. Atherton stepped into the room a moment, spoke to two or three of his guests—

"I'm going to give you a surprise to-night," he said.

They laughed. "We're all ready for it," one of them cried.

He nodded to Orton. His look made Hardy question whether Atherton had ever been hostile to him. It was the same look of amused toleration which he had always shown. Had Orton not known better he would have thought the look more amused and less tolerant than usual.

"Well, daddy," Arlene asked easily, "my crowd is all here. Where's yours?"

"Coming, I hope," said her father. "Ah, I guess that's they now."

Orton's motor-trained ear caught the hum of an engine, knew it for the purr of a Ford. A sudden chill struck through him. Did he know it for a certain, individual Ford? He felt a choking sensation, as he waited.

Oddly, Mr. Atherton had closed the library door as he went to the hall to meet the last arrivals. The young folk had resumed their light chatter. The room seemed to swim about Hardy's head.

He pulled himself together. It could not be. His imagination was playing him tricks.

He jumped at the slight click of the lock as the hall door was opened, though he was probably the only person in the room who heard the sound. He looked up, dropped his gaze, forced himself to look up again.

Mr. Atherton was pausing on the threshold to let his guests pass.

Orton felt the sinking sensation once more. He wondered if all in the room were watching him and comparing him to that early Christian who peered through a door to see whether a lady or a tiger were on the other side and left to the reader's guess which.

And in she came. For one giddy moment Orton measured the distance and the obstacles between him and the door to the den which gave upon a balcony whence he might leap into the darkness and keep going indefinitely. Obviously Mrs. Polhemus was oblivious to any impending excitement.

On her face was that simpering smile which ladies of her type assume for an occasion. She was very erect even as she smiled, a perfect example, in her stiff high collar and jet-bead-adorned black silk gown, of prudishness shocked at the bare necks and shoulders in the room, yet prudishness determined to keep itself in hand and its indignation from expressing itself.

"Mrs. Polhemus — and Mr. Polhemus," Mr. Atherton was saying blandly as the spare, stooped, side-whiskered male escort of the lady followed his wife into the room.

Mr. Polhemus gave one quick glance at Orton, then dropped his eyes and waited for the explosion that would come when Mrs. Polhemus saw her ex-chauffeur.

Had her back been turned to him she must have wheeled under the stress of the wild, tortured, trapped, fascinated gaze of Orton's eyes. Four steps inside the room she stopped and returned the gaze.

She stood still. The shock of her own indignation seemed to have turned her to stone—but stone that panted with quick heaving of the breast, stone that reddened in the face until the red purpled and the big vessels in her temples seemed swollen to the bursting point.

Mr. Atherton stood still. Neither tolerance nor amusement was now in his face. He wore the grim look of a parent who has made up his mind to thrash his child.

The other young men in the room had risen. They stood still. Their eyes, the eyes of the young lady guests, the eyes of Arlene Atherton stared from Orton to Mrs. Polhemus, from her to Orton, back again to her — frightened, puzzled eyes, that wondered what terrible thing had happened or was going to happen.

Orton had often wondered how a person could quail, just what he did when he quailed. He knew he was quailing now; he could not help it, even if all the rest of the world were watching him do it.

His brain went on like a thing detached. He saw how it had all come about.

Mr. Atherton meeting Mr. Polhemus, making vague inquiries about Orton's supposed progress in the Polhemotor business; Mr. Polhemus's account of his connection with Orton; Atherton's seizing upon the opportunity to break by strenuous measures an engagement he had never approved. Orton's brain went on and tried to decide whether Polhemus had told his wife what she was coming to, and if her indignant surprise was only for dramatic effect.

But Orton himself only stared back into the awful accusation and denunciation and condemnation and annihilation written in Mrs. Polhemus's swelling features. It seemed that the woman could not trust herself to speak, was, perhaps, at a loss how to speak.

That she was hindered by any delicate regard for the feelings of the others present or for the amenities of the occasion was unthinkable. She had no feelings herself, could not understand feelings. She was the sort of person who never could swerve from allegiance to duty or be quite happy in doing a duty that was not somewhat painful — especially if it were painful to others.

Her pause could be only for its own dramatic effect, perhaps for the purpose of seeking out the words that would be most effective when she spoke them. But it lasted so long that some of the young folk began to draw in suspended breaths.

It was Arlene who could stand the scene no longer. Her voice came in a quivering little whisper:

"What—what is the matter?"

And Mrs. Polhemus turned to Mr. Atherton, the while she covered Orton with an accusing finger which would have been effectual to send his hands skyward had she bidden him put them up.

"Mr. Atherton," she asked with her strident voice, made vibrant by the fierce emotions within her—"pardon me. But what is that young man doing in your home?"

"Why," Mr. Atherton answered suavely, "that is Mr. Hardwick Orton, Mrs. Polhemus. He holds an important position in your husband's business, I understand. He is—"

"Oh, I know who he is," she now broke in, at the same time breaking down the floodgates to her pent-up feelings. "He's a miserable impostor, a worthless vagabond. In Mr. Polhemus's employ! I—guess—not!"

"I employed the wretched young scoundrel last July as a chauffeur. I took his sullen impertinences and impudences because I felt some interest in his apparent need of a job. Mr. Polhemus had *promised* him a position in his business."

"And *he*—much as I regret to have to speak ill of one of your guests, Mr. Atherton—he rewarded my kindness by remaining only until he had collected a week's wages. Then he drove me wildly to a lonely spot some miles from my home and left me there, a helpless woman in my car, to get back as best I might, while he sauntered to the railroad station and disappeared. Of all the worthless scamps, the wickedly malicious rascals I ever knew, he is the last I should have expected to find decking himself in evening clothes to appear in a gentleman's home."

"Mr. Atherton, you'd better have him arrested. I should not have accused him of being a thief. I can imagine no other excuse for his presence here. He's probably a mere Raffles."

"And," Mr. Polhemus supplemented his wife's words, his eyes blinking and opening, his brows lifting and lowering, his glasses wabbling until they fell to the end of their string—"and he'd have got away with a cool hundred if he'd but waited another hour to go. He had impressed me so much, I was going to put him in charge of a branch station of our business in Cleveland and had wired him to get a hundred dollars from my wife for traveling expenses and telegraphed her to give it to him. He even got his telegram, but didn't dare go back to try to get the money."

As he finished he looked at Atherton in a manner which showed he had prepared his part and hoped it was satisfactory. Atherton looked satisfied.

A tense silence ensued. The young people were all staring at Orton. Only three or four of them had any real acquaintance with him or knew anything about his business history. None knew his financial status.

Orton opened his white lips thrice and choked back the words he had thought to utter each time.

He was trapped. His hopeful bluff was called. All the explaining in the world, all the truth and all the lies he might tell would leave him exposed as a cheap bluffer who had tried to impose upon an innocent wealthy girl's credulity and affections.

And again Arlene broke the spell of silence. She, too, was white—whiter than Orton. She clutched at a little column on the piano-case to steady her as she swayed weakly.

But she held her head proudly erect. Her eyes met Mrs. Polhemus's and held them with a glare of scorn more intense and deadly than the worst Mrs. Polhemus's eyes could look. And she controlled her voice.

"Mrs. Polhemus," she spoke swiftly, fiercely, though hardly above a whisper, "Mr. Orton is engaged to marry me. I am not ashamed to own it. I love him. I don't know why or care why he engaged himself to you as your chauffeur this summer. I wish—"

Just for an instant the anger got the better of her control. Her voice rose a little.

"I wish he had left you so far in the woods that you had never found your way out or here. I hate you now. I hate *you!*" she hurled the words at the meek husband of the termagant. "And I hate you—*hate you, HATE YOU!*" she flung at her father.

A moment, then, she bit into her white lips and gulped convulsively. Then she got breath enough to speak to her lover:

"Come, Hardy. For my sake, don't humiliate yourself by remaining in this room—until *they* are gone. Come with me."

Orton rose again from the chair into which he had dropped unconsciously under the fairly physical force of Mrs. Polhemus's denunciation.

He was moved, swayed, almost hypnotized by the magnificent courage of his sweetheart. He had never wanted more in his life to escape a scene; but he wished yet more to get to Arlene's side and take her away before the terrific strain of the situation should break her down into hysteria or a dead faint.

One step he took toward her. Then he suddenly realized the eyes that were upon him, the unexplained accusation he was fleeing from, the reflection Arlene would suffer from it.

He had not noticed that Atherton had stepped forward, too, as if to intercept him.

The details of the scene were lost in the presence of the vision of his duty to himself and his greater duty to the girl.

"You help her," he spoke in a tone of quick command to her father. "I must tell these people the truth."

CHAPTER XXII.

MILITARY PARK.

ORTON steadied himself for the ordeal of confession, then swept the group with his eyes and rested them, not wholly without an effort, upon Mrs. Polhemus's still flushed face. Then he smiled a little.

"Mrs. Polhemus has told you the truth," he said lightly. "I might as well tell you the rest of the story."

Briefly, swiftly, he recounted the whole adventure, her method of getting him to Madison without telling him the wages she would pay, of Mr. Polhemus's promises and forgetfulness in fulfilling the one about making up the deficit in his salary, of the wife's plan to modify fifteen dollars a week to sixty a month, of her deferring to pay him until four days after his first week was ended, of the dollar subtracted for the window broken in cleaning her dirty cellar.

"I'm sorry now that I doubted Mr. Polhemus's good intentions," he said. "As for leaving Mrs. Polhemus in the woods a mile from her home—um-m-m— Yes, I'm sorry that I'm still vulgarly rude enough to feel that it gave me the best money's worth I ever had for the seven or eight dollars she owed me at the time."

Arlene had refused mutely but firmly to leave the room. Her father had got her seated in a corner of the library near a window. She was so far revived that she took the chance of shutting off her breath with a handkerchief as she watched the flustered face of her lover's accuser. Her shoulders were shaking with a laugh of unholty joy at Mrs. Polhemus's confusion.

Even her father hid a grin behind his fingers. Mr. Polhemus was the only person beside his wife who looked unhappy; and he looked as if his unhappiness lay largely in not daring to laugh with the rest. Then Orton changed his tone.

"I don't know as I would bother you with that sort of petty quarrel. I have a more serious apology to make to you for such part as I may have had in bringing this unfortunate evening to pass.

"Certainly some of you know that the engagement that was to have been announced to-night is not entirely new. When it was made I believed I had good grounds for expecting to be in a position to marry and to support such a lady as Miss Atherton.

"The fault for which I now make apology has been caused by my unwillingness to surrender the hope of being able to carry out the engagement. That fault had been the maintaining of that engagement when the only ground for hoping to fulfil it was an idiotically cheerful disposition and the attempt to deceive Miss Atherton and her father into the belief that the hope had more definitely tangible grounds.

"For ~~that~~ I cannot make amends. I can only apologize, only express utter regret. I do not even ask forgiveness. To have let this evening be possible was something for which I deserve no forgiveness.

"There is only one thing for me to do, without any asking for sympathy, compassion, or pardon. That thing I am going to do now. I am going out of this house, to the hospitality of which I have not any claim. I am going out of your lives and hers. All I ask is that all of you do what you can to help her forget that she ever knew any one so unworthy of her love as I am."

He crossed the room unceremoniously and unhindered by the astonished company. As he reached the door he was aware, though he did not glance back to see, that Arlene had arisen to her feet, was calling his name, and that her father drew her back to her seat. As he picked his hat and coat from the hall-rack he heard Atherton's voice:

"He's a lot more of a man than I thought he was. If I had known I'd never have done this. But even now he does not know what is his real lack. The thing about him that drove me to desperate measures is his inability to stick to any one thing long enough to get a result out of it."

As he descended the steps and moved down the carefully trimmed walk to the street Orton thought, with a shrug, that Atherton might be right about it. It could make no difference now at any rate. He was done.

The inspiration of ambition and hope was gone; gone the cause for the desire of success. He had always enjoyed living well, dressing well, holding his place amongst

other men of his class. To do that he had not needed to be rich.

His wish to accomplish something, to be truly successful, to make enough money to count himself at least fairly rich—that had all been part of his desire to marry Arlene Atherton. In his struggle to attain her level he had stepped out of the society of his own kind. He no longer wished to go back to it.

Down Heller Parkway to the cars on Mount Prospect Avenue—he wondered if he would ever walk up that street again. Probably not, he thought. He had wished to live on it, had even picked the plot on which, in imagination, he had planned a fitting residence for Atherton's daughter.

Arlene Atherton, Heller Parkway, all that made Forest Hill the desirable section of the city—were gone from his life. Never again would he be stirred with the ambition to make himself of the number who may really afford to live in its best blocks.

At the corner, as he stopped and noted that no trolley was in sight, he turned and looked back. A heavy touring car at that moment came roaring up the grade from Summer Avenue at second speed. Its chauffeur attempted to take advantage of the broad level across Mount Prospect Avenue to shift gears for a dash up the rest of the hill on high speed.

The results were disastrous. A quick shift back to second gear failed to help the engine regain its momentum. An oversupply of gas had sooted a spark-plug and sent a cylinder "dead." Hardly forty yards up the grade the car was at a standstill.

"I guess I'm like that old rattler," he muttered. "I tried to go up there on high speed. Then I didn't make it on any other speed. I—"

Then the bitterness of the loss of all it had meant to him to go up there became unbearable. He could not wait for the trolley. He turned and started to walk back to the boarding-house.

Orton lost his temporary garage job at noon the next day. He did not care. A job more or less made no more difference than anything else. He was rather glad to get the chance to go to his room and try to forget everything in sleep.

Without any moral scruples on the subject, Orton had been very nearly a total abstainer all his life. On his way to the boarding-house he stopped at a saloon and drank two glasses of beer. His few previ-

ous experiences with alcohol had taught him that a little of it made him sleepy.

On the table in his room lay an envelope. For a second Orton's heart leaped wildly as he saw his name in Arlene's handwriting. Then, as he lifted the missive and felt its weight, his heart sank again. Arlene was returning his ring.

Slowly he tore open the dainty envelope. A check fell from the sheet of paper he drew forth. He picked it up and stared at it, puzzled, until he read its amount.

It was signed by her father; eight hundred and fifty dollars, the price of the Rollerton Six he had given Arlene, which she could not return since it had been wrecked. He tore the check in two before reading the letter.

DEAR HARDY:

Enclosed you will find your ring. Please don't try to guess how hard it is for me to give it up. I know you are suffering too.

But it must be so. Last night I would not have believed it. I was ready to forgive you for your deceptions, which I know were only practised for love of me. I was ready to take all the money I could get and to come to you and insist that you elope with me. If I had not been too ill, I should have done it, I think.

But this morning I got a letter from a very dear old cousin of mine. She wrote to tell me she had just separated from her husband after seven years of married life. She has three children. She has been keeping a boarding-house for the past two years to support them.

As I read, I thought at first that I would be ready to do that or to take in sewing or to wash or scrub or beg for you. Then I remembered when Betty was married. I was barely fourteen. It was her talk of her husband which gave me my first ideas of love.

And her husband was a splendid fellow, quite well-to-do, as devoted to her as she to him. He lacked but one thing—persistence. From one business to another he shifted too easily. Each shift took its toll from his fortune. When he could no longer keep his wife in good clothes and servants and luxuries, when she began to fade with the cares thrown upon her, when weariness made her uncontrollably irritable as discouragement made him—they quarreled more and more frequently, more and more bitterly, till love—was dead.

Maybe I am as strong a woman as Betty; maybe my love is stronger. I don't dare put it and your love for me to the test. Hardy, you have never kept one business connection a year. In the brief time of our engagement, you have been in at least three positions and have given them up.

Another man has been making excellent money out of the agency for the Rollerton Sixes. I know, because Jessie Wilmot just

bought one and took me along when she was getting her demonstration.

Other men are getting your Orton Cars on the market with decided success. Father has just got one of them. He tells me the business could have been developed without the addition of a cent of extra capital.

I don't blame you much for leaving Mrs. Polhemus. I wonder you stayed a week out. But there are more than a dozen agencies that you have given up in less than half a dozen years. If there were only one thing to which you had held on until you were at least put off—

Oh, I can't bear to think of it, to write of it. I know that some day I would lose respect for you. For you would be a failure. And that would be worse than this.

And so I am giving up your ring, giving up—no, I can't say yet that I am giving you up. I can't quite give up the hope that you'll get hold of something and keep hold of it until your clever mind and hands begin to get results. And, if you ever do that, you'll not have to wait to earn a fortune; before you'll learn how little you've passed out of my life. Unless you are married to some other woman, you will have to refuse me yourself, for I shall certainly propose to you. For I am afraid I can't learn not to love you as I have loved you ever since I first knew you.

ARLENE.

P. S. I am enclosing a check for the car you gave me. Can't you use it to get started a little toward the things to which you'll stick?

"She might have spared me the lecture," Orton muttered.

In his anger he wished to make known to her that he spurned the check. The ring might symbolize something which no longer existed, their plighted troth. The little Six had been a present.

He picked up the torn check, scrawled a few words across a sheet of note paper—"I'm not asking my presents back, thank you," signed it, folded the check inside, stamped and addressed an envelope.

He was not satisfied until he had taken it down to the post-office and mailed it. As he started from his room he snatched up the ring and took it with him.

From the post-office he went to the jewelry store. There was a little cheap haggling over the relic of his love. They gave him back a hundred dollars of what he had paid.

He took the money to the Federal Trust Company's bank and deposited it. So long had it been since he had deposited money there that the receiving teller asked him where he had spent the summer.

Well, he thought, there would be no more

garage work while that lasted. And it should last him until he heard from some one of the places which had offered some hope of openings not too remote.

The beer had heated his blood, and now that he had spent the force of his anger by doing all he could about it, he felt tired to the point of weakness. He dropped upon one of the benches in the park instead of continuing back to the boarding-house across it.

"I tried to make it on high speed," he thought bitterly. "And here I am."

Perhaps Military Park was, in what its benches stood for, about as far from Forest Hill as one could get in Newark. A hundred-yard walk in any one of a dozen of New York's parks would show more typical down-and-outers than could be mustered in all Newark's open spaces. The professionally unemployed are happily few in that town which, from being too near America's first city, loses the glory of being the thirteenth in point of population.

But Military Park shows rather more of the derelict type than any of the others in the town. A bench in any park is a poor place for a man on the sunny side of the prime of life. In Orton's mind sitting there that day was as distinctly emblematic of hopelessness, of shipwreck, of failure, as prison stripes are emblematic of crime. And—

A man is very nearly a failure when he admits it to himself.

But Orton had not acquired the habit of viewing failure with any genuine indifference or apathy. The bitterness of his thoughts soon became unbearable. The beer had not done the trick of dulling his feelings; it had added to his heat and made him thirstier than ever.

Diagonally across from where he sat swung the doors of the Park Café. Before its bar he hesitated a moment later. If he had never regarded beer as a seriously harmful beverage, he had maintained a different feeling for liquors. But the beer palled on him now. He had had more than enough of it.

Then he shrugged his shoulders. He had tried, he had failed. He had none left to care about. He had nothing more to look forward to.

A bitter little laugh barely sounded in his throat. He ran his eye across the shelfful of bottles until it recognized the label of a much advertised brand—

"A glass of Hunter, please," he said huskily to the white-aproned man behind the bar.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ROPE'S END.

THERE is a stage of liquor's influence on some men, several drinks to the sober side of that loss of self control which marks complete intoxication—a stage where the senses are partially dulled, the feelings numbed, but the brain acutely, intensely alive. In just that condition a man may walk erect and accurately straight, may talk distinctly enough to deceive the most careful observer—but he does both with a conscious effort.

During the weeks which followed Orton's first attempt to dull his sense of failure he reached that stage a number of times, but never passed it. His old acquaintances were seeing very little of him in those days. But even those so close to him as the other boarders at Mrs. Burney's failed to perceive that he was drinking heavily.

They did notice, however, that he had ceased to be the cheerful, ready mixing, lively member of their number, that he had become silent, gloomy, morose, at times almost ugly.

Not that Orton had become an utterly sodden creature in the space of a few days, or that he lived entirely down to the level of this alcohol-exaggerated despair. He still pulled himself together of mornings, still wrote letters to the possible givers of positions, still made runs to New York and to other neighboring towns to interview men who might have positions to offer or know of such positions as he had reason to believe himself qualified to fill.

Occasionally he grew ashamed of his own weakness, occasionally became frightened with the thought of becoming like some drunken wreck who crossed his path. Then he would attend theatres afternoon and evening for three or four days, until his head ached from the artificial lighting and ventilation of the places.

But he returned from the boredom of those amusements to the kick of alcohol. He saw nothing sufficiently interesting to withdraw him from himself; he found himself uninteresting save when his brain was stimulated for the dissection of his woes.

By the middle of October he had drawn

out the last twenty-five dollars of the hundred he had got back on the ring. He was no nearer a desirable position than at the moment when he took the train from Madison to Newark.

He had paid back his little debts to Herman and the others, but he had not done so as promptly as he could have done, and he lacked the courage to approach them for other loans. Two of his best suits of clothes and his watch he had redeemed from the pawnshops. He was saving them, wearing them only when he went to see men about jobs.

On Monday, the twenty-fifth of last October, Hardy Orton passed his last five-dollar note across the counter of the Park Café. It had been raining in the morning, sufficient excuse for remaining at home, sufficient reason for a little more than ordinary depression. Temperamental people are seldom happy when it rains.

As was his habit now, he drank slowly after the second glass, waiting for the numbing tingle in his hands and feet and the slight contraction of the eye muscles which he had come to count as the signals of sufficiency. The third drink did not bring them that day.

He took a fourth and engaged in the conversation of two men as to the latest developments of the war. He stepped over to the ticker and idly read a little from the tape. Still the warm numbing failed to come.

He went back to the bar. Surely a very little more of the fiery liquor would effect the desired "kick." He started to pour hardly more than a tablespoonful into his glass, then was struck by some notion of economy that reminded him he must pay as much for this as for the glassful.

Suddenly, as he sipped the first cautious mouthful of a larger drink than usual, the room seemed warm and close. He felt weak, nauseated. He wanted air. And that beclouded brain which seemed to see everything so much more clearly than in sober moments, which really could see but one thing at a time, and about twice as long a time as it should have taken it, prompted him to hurry the rest of his drink and get out of the place.

As he passed out of the door he realized that something had gone wrong with the schedule of alcohol's effect. The signals had failed to work. Now he had got numbed without any tingle; he felt no con-

traction of the muscles, but he could not focus his eyes at all.

He thought to pull himself together with a few long inhalations of smoke. He spilled three cigarettes from his box and dropped two more before he could place one in his lips. Half a dozen attempts to light it failed. Then the cigarette seemed to have lighted itself. His mind was a blank upon the accomplishment of his purpose.

"I'm drunk," something entirely outside himself seemed to think aloud. He took a step and collided with a man hurrying on his way to the Hudson Tube Station.

"I'd better get home and into bed," the strange brain thought. Then it forgot about going home. "I'll have to sit down before I fall down," it decided and found the idea immensely amusing.

Across Park Place were the benches in the park. A sharp honk from a Ford jitney startled him back to the curb before he was aware he had left it. It seemed quite a miracle that he had got up without tripping.

With a tremendous effort he ascertained that nothing more was approaching in either direction. He aimed himself across the street—got there. It seemed to him that two youths were laughing at him from the spot he had just left.

He wanted to go back and beat them up for it. But a whole procession of jitneys was now hurrying from the last train at the Tube terminal. He forgot the two youths.

He ran into some one else. He lifted his hat in deep apology, and then discovered that he had collided not with a woman but a man.

"You'd better sit down before you fall down." He wasn't sure whether he had said it himself or heard it from the lips of the man he had bumped.

"Guess I don't have to sit down for you," he muttered thickly—then saw that the person addressed was already hurrying half a block away.

But the bit of defiance stuck to him. He passed across the circle of benches just above the flag-staff, walked on along the path that parallels Broad Street.

He would not sit down for any one. He needed to walk. Walking would help him get sober.

He was awakened slowly and uneasily by the frightful pains of neuralgia in his head. It seemed that he had sat down

finally, and fallen asleep on a somewhat sheltered bench on one of the diagonal crosswalks. He was burning with thirst. His brain had cleared partly, and his eyes saw when he forced himself to endure the torture of looking.

The drinking fountain was but a few steps away. He got up heavily, stiff with cold, trembling, sick. Heedless of billions of germs he placed his whole mouth over the bubble-fountain and drew great drafts from it, as if he would suck all the water from the reservoirs of the city.

But he must have some powder to stop the ache of his head. Across the street, half a block down, were confectionary stores. They would sell doses of headache cure at their soda-fountains. At all events he could walk now.

The soda-clerk in the first store refused him a second dose of the acetanilid powder for fear of its effect on the heart. Orton went on down to the second store and got more there. The pain began to ease rapidly.

He started back across Broad Street. An unspeakable lassitude crept over him. He thought that a little rest and the fresh air would help more than his bed in his room. A bench in a little recess from the sidewalk invited him. He dropped heavily into it.

But he was no longer sleepy, only very weak and very tired and depressed with a weight of gloom which combined with the racked nerves to bring tears to his eyes. As the pain left his head it seemed to bear down upon his heart and very soul.

He had come to the end. He had finished his demonstration of his own unfitness to cope with the world by getting as beastly drunk as the saddest outcast of the slums. The only further folly he could commit would be to prolong the agony until the few dollars in his pocket were gone, to eke those out by returning to the pawnshops.

Up in one of the latter he had seen a very good automatic pistol that could be bought with four dollars. He had examined its mechanism and found it of fine quality. Even now, in his last ditch of despair, he could prefer to die by a bit of perfect machinery.

He was sitting almost bolt upright, in such a position that no passing policeman was apt to notice him or think of him but as some man waiting for some one else in the stores across the street.

Suddenly out of the bunch of cars just

released from the Market Street traffic whistle, his eye picked one bright and new. He knew it by its hood. He would have known it as well almost by some bolt from its frame. It was an Orton Car.

And Arlene Atherton was driving it, slowly, easily. He could not take his eyes from the fascinating sight.

Suddenly a thousand realizations crowded his brain at once. The coat he was wearing had not been to the tailor's this fall; the suit beneath it he had worn too steadily, and it was seedy and wanting in creases. The setting sun was shining straight down New Street to light up these defects and the little Orton Car was coming to a standstill at the curb beside him.

Of course he did not realize that his face was ghastly pale from the aftermath of his drinking. But he did catch the note of utter alarm and concern in the girl's voice as she called across the walk—

"Hardy! Why, Hardy! Oh—Oh—Hardy!" It was almost a wail.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LADDER'S BOTTOM.

ALL the instincts of a life-time's breeding sprang up to warn Orton to get to his feet, to stiffen his back, his gait, to give tone to his voice, to hide the condition which he fancied was very perceptibly one of intoxication.

"Why, how do you do, Arlene?" he said with an affected cheerfulness he found surprisingly easy to manage. "Is anything wrong with the car?"

"Oh, no," the girl responded. His demeanor, so utterly at variance with his appearance, rather disconcerted her. "I—I thought—have you been sick, Hardy?"

"No, not at all," he told her. "I did have a headache and thought the fresh air here would help me for a few minutes. It has. The headache has quite gone."

She eyed him carefully. Still she seemed to find something that hurt in his appearance. He dropped his eyes before her gaze, then raised them with an effort.

"I see you are looking very well," he now remarked. "And your father?"

"Quite well, thank you." Arlene was flushing with mortification at the turn he was giving the interview. Her part in it seemed ridiculous.

"Good-by," she said suddenly, with quick

speeding of the motor and inserting of the clutch.

"Good-by," he called after her.

He felt a singular triumph. Arlene had made an advance toward him, and he had managed to repulse her.

It cheered him through the hour before dinner. The thought of suicide had vanished. No definite intention was born to do anything; to set forth again and more earnestly on a quest for a job. He simply blinked the fact that he was at the end of his resources, forgot it, and gave himself up to the rather mean enjoyment of the joke Arlene's addressing him had been upon her.

And at dinner the guests noted that he was rather in higher spirits than had been his wont in his most prosperous days.

He determined to spend the evening in a theater. A burlesque show was being advertised on the billboards; it was the kind of thing to help him celebrate his good humor. He decided to change his clothes.

Then, as he reached his room, the elation was gone. He felt suddenly weary, weak, exhausted. He dropped into a chair.

What a moment before had seemed a triumph turned to ashes as he tried to revive the thrill of it. Arlene had shown herself an angel, ready to stoop to aid him, since it must have cost her a sacrifice of pride even to speak to him. And he had lied to her, flung her kindly, loving good-will back into her face, humiliated her further.

He had never deserved a smile from her. He was a wretched, worthless failure, a man without the strength to meet the ordinary adversities of life, with the courage only to hide his face from them by getting drunk.

And she—Oh, God! What he had missed in losing her!

His head sank into his hands. Tears—a little maudlin, perhaps—trickled over them. Sobs shook his shoulders. Orton was temperamental.

Then, slowly, came the resolution that must complete any true penance. He might never marry her. He would yet prove worthy of having been loved by her. He would go forth to work; he would stick to any job, at least until a better was definitely in his hands. He would succeed or die in the attempt.

Arlene was too good ever to be his wife. But he would do what he might to save her from ever again being ashamed of having loved him.

And the door-bell of the boarding house tinkled. A moment later Mrs. Burney's maid tapped at his door.

"A message for you, Mr. Orton. The boy said there was no answer, so I brought it on up."

He took the dainty envelope. The writing was Arlene's. With trembling fingers he tore it open. Then he paused, weakly fearful of what its contents might be. Finally he brushed the blurr from his eyes and read:

DEAR HARDY:

Please pardon me if I presume again. I still believe that you are possessed of sufficient perception to know it is not easy for me to presume again. I still believe in you.

To-night I overheard Mr. Simpson telling dad that he was having great difficulty in securing men with enough knowledge of automobiles to help intelligently in installing the machinery in the plant he is putting up, I think, on Emmet Street near the Pennsylvania Freight tracks.

Of course I don't know whether you have a position now vastly better than there might be there. I really don't know anything about what sort of workmen he means. But I can't resist the impulse to let you know about what seems to my ignorance a possible chance. Mr. Simpson is a man who does not start things without a prospect of their growing into big business, and I can't help feeling that you, with the abilities I know you have, could quickly fit into something good there.

Now laugh at me if you want to, if you know that the thing could not work out that way, if you have a better position or more promising one than this could be. I'm only a foolish girl about these things.

But I do want to see you succeed, make good, if not for my sake, for your own sake, for the sake of the clever brain and the skill I know you have. And—yes, it is at least a little for my sake, "for old sake's sake" at least.

I want to see you go to the top, if I have to look with a telescope. I want it so badly that I couldn't hear even a hint of a chance of it without writing to let you know. And, whether you've succeeded in getting me out of your mind or not, I insist on remaining still and always,

Your sincere friend,

ARLENE ATHERTON.

He was in the frame of mind to read between the lines, to detect that the letter contained a little white fibbing, to believe that Arlene had, either personally, or by stampeding her father, secured a place for him. His over-stimulated nerves were in condition for sentimentality.

He kissed the word friend. Humbly he forbade himself to dream that she might again be more than a friend to him. But

such a friend—an angel, a patron saint, a goddess!

He would be true to her, true to her faith in him, her hopes for him. He would yet be a man. This time he would stick, *stick*, STICK.

That at least was a self-acknowledgment of his weakness. Always before he had found the fault with his job. There was another acknowledgment that his hitherto complete self-confidence had been jolted from its over-sureness. He resolved to take no chances with different sentiments on a "morning after."

He hurried down-stairs to the telephone, found Mr. Simpson's residence, made an appointment to see the man immediately. Then he changed his clothes and walked with a briskness almost incredible to himself after the day he had spent, to Broad Street and a Mount Prospect car.

The address was on Clifton Avenue. Orton got the conductor to consult his little red book as to the best way to reach it.

"Get off at Heller Parkway," the conductor bade him. "It's about six numbers back this way from the corner."

Orton could not escape the little thrill. The Atherton home was two blocks farther up the hill, past Clifton Avenue. A month ago he had thought he might never go up Heller Parkway again. Was there an omen of the future in the coincidence that his first real move back toward manhood should take him at least one block up that same street?

Mr. Simpson's address proved to be a much less pretentious place than that of the Athertons'. Mr. Simpson himself admitted Orton, invited him to the small library, saw him seated.

"You were saying over the telephone something about a place in the establishment that we are building," he quickly said, bringing things to a point. "I don't know as I ought to have let you trouble to come up here. There really isn't any place for a man of your sort."

Orton's heart sank. He suddenly believed more literally in what Arlene had written. He felt rather disappointed that she had not herself made the position for him.

"We hope soon to begin manufacturing in the new plant. Practically all the machinery is set up. What we want now is simply machinists. What I have wanted to get was men who knew not only how to

make a wheel or a joint or any other part from a pattern, but also were familiar enough with automobiles to grasp the whole mechanism into which the part is to fit.

"Just now most of those men seem to be working in garages and other factories. I'm not sure that we are in a position to offer more than regular wages to get them away from their present jobs. But, as I say, I could offer you only a machinist's place. I hardly imagine you would want that."

Orton swallowed hard. His hopes had been raised above a machinist's job.

"What would be the chance of advancement?" he asked falteringly.

"Well, that's something else," Simpson instantly answered with a more encouraging tone. "A man who held on until we got things started and on a paying basis on the new scale—you might say there was a chance for him to land as big as his brains and energy could keep him going. I don't intend to manage the factory more than a couple of years at the outside. The very top will be wide open, you see. But I couldn't encourage you to hope for anything inside three or four months, except—"

"Except what?" Orton asked when Simpson paused.

"Except in case of the unexpected that might happen," Simpson responded with a smile.

"I think I'll take a job, if you'll let me," Orton decided.

"You will? Well, it's a sort of bottom beginning for a man who has been running a factory of his own; but there are a lot of places where the ladder isn't nearly so easy to get up. I'll be glad to have you."

"When can I begin work?"

"We haven't got our own whistle blowing yet," Mr. Simpson answered with a laugh. "But the factory half a block away blows one at seven-thirty every morning. Any time after it blows, you can begin work, if you'll report to the foreman on the fourth floor."

"I'll be there," Orton promised heartily. "And I'll hang on, too. I guess I can stand running a lathe a while. But I give you fair warning that I'm out for your big job."

"It's an open field and no favorites thus far," Simpson told him. "We have two pretty good foremen who cast greedy eyes at my desk every time they pass by; but you've the brains and education that ought to get you past them if you half try. Go to it."

Half an hour later Orton was writing a reply to Arlene's letter.

DEAR ARLENE:

I came very near to violating my promise to help you forget me even more than I must now violate it to write this letter. I wanted to thank you in person for the tip you were so much better than I deserve as to give me this evening. But I couldn't trust myself to remember my place, if I had done that. If I get too personal now, put it down as a mistake. I know I can never hope to have the right I really never had to ask you to marry me. I am only trying to express adequate thanks for your act of friendship.

I have landed a place with Mr. Simpson. Of course it is not a very big place now. After the many times I have fallen down I can hardly expect to be put at the head of a business.

But there is every chance in the world. The manager's post is to be vacant in less than two years. All I have to do is to hang on and work hard to land it. And you may bet your last dollar against the air in a busted tire that, this time I'm going to hang on.

Orton paused when he had finished that last bit of original asseveration. It occurred to him the time for boasting was not yet. Arlene might compare his words with certain other hopeful expressions he had uttered and find them too similar for further credence. He wrote another letter:

DEAR ARLENE:

Please accept my heartfelt thanks for the undeserved favor you have done me. At least there is no further excuse for me to pretend with you any more. Your tip about Mr. Simpson has probably saved me from want. I have already seen him and secured a job.

The prospects of the place are good. If I can but hang on and work hard, there is no good reason why I should not reach the managership sooner or later.

But I am not going to promise to hang on. I have made too many boasts. All I can say now is that I at last realize the weakness which has brought about my present state; and that I am going to try to overcome it for my own manhood's sake, as you say, and yet more to be worthy of the friendship you have shown, which is the highest honor I may any longer aspire to.

"That sounds more like business," Orton quoth to himself. And that was why he had written it that way, not because he really doubted that he would hang on, make good, and be at the head of the new motor-car factory.

Was there any real difference between this and Orton's regular keenness for the novelty and the future mysteries of a new job? Time alone could tell. Orton least of all men was fitted to judge as yet.

He had not been in the new shop two hours before certain familiar features of the patterns on which he was working caused him to ask the man at the next lathe the name of the new car. The answer did not surprise him.

"It's the Orton Car they've been making in the garage back of the salesroom up on Broad and Central."

Orton only wondered that Simpson and Arlene had both failed to mention it.

A third hour's work brought him to a gear-cutting machine. In a moment he saw that this was not properly adjusted for producing the part as needed. A change would prevent hours of totally unnecessary grinding in assembling the car.

Callin, the foreman, was passing him at the moment. Orton called him over to the machine and suggested the change.

To his astonishment, the other's response was a burst of profanity.

"Say, young man, who's doing this—you or me? I set them adjustments myself, and I want them left the way I put them. It's according to the pattern. The machine won't cut them no different, anyhow."

"Why, yes it will," Orton insisted. "All you need to do—"

"Say, never mind what I need to do," snarled the foreman. "You ain't boss around here by a big sight."

It was at this moment that another workman came within hearing distance above the hum of machinery.

"Hey, Bill," cried the superior. "This young feller thinks he's the Orton that owns the works."

Orton flushed. He would have hated far worse to admit that he was the designer of the car they were making than to take Mr. Callin's bluster. The foreman was mightily pleased with his own joke. He made a mock bow to Orton as he ordered:

"Since you ain't suited with that gear-cutter, Mr. President, you can go down there and show us how we ought to forge them rivets into the frame."

It was heavy work for Orton, softened by a month's idleness and indulgence in stimulants. His arms soon ached, his back took up the pain. He wondered whether he would not be able presently to get under some other foreman, wondered whether he would not get into trouble with this one if he had to stay long.

A few minutes later Mr. Simpson was on the floor. Callin led the manager to the

gear-cutting machine. He seemed to be showing Simpson something that interested the latter very much. Callin and the manager came past Orton at the forge.

"It's a very great improvement, Callin," Simpson was saying. "I'm glad you thought it out."

The foreman returned, paused a moment, and then burst out with an epithet:

"You ——— loafing ———, are you going to be all day driving a couple of dozen rivets through one frame?"

Orton dropped his hammer with a crash to the floor. He stepped toward the foreman, his eyes aflame in a face pale with rage.

"Look here, Callin," he snapped, "don't you get the idea that I'm so stuck on this job or any other that I won't take the chance of licking you if you say much more like that to me."

CHAPTER XXV.

A STRAW IN THE SCALE.

OF course there was no fight. Callin was essentially a bully with a bully's cowardice. Nor did he dare to fire a man whom Simpson had hired until he had ascertained just how much Simpson had cared about hiring him. The conflict resolved itself into the sort of blustering-match which make the beginning and end of nine-tenths of such affairs.

Orton himself regretted his threat the moment it was uttered. He had been doing a lot of thinking in the time between the discovery of the identity of the car for which the place was being fitted out and the un-called-for outburst on the foreman's part.

The result of that thinking had been the conclusion that his present rather humble job was solely in the nature of a try-out of his patience. Certainly Simpson had known that the man who had first made Orton Cars was competent to run a factory for their continued manufacture, at least up to the point of superintendency.

Well, he would not let a matter of patience stand between him and such an opportunity. Superintending the factory might not have the dignity or the remunerations of running the business and owning it. But it was a better job than any other he might hope for in many years now. Perhaps it was as good a job as he was fitted

for. He still felt that the worries of complete management had broken him down last summer.

Orton smiled as he reached these conclusions. Let Callin curse his head off. Let the bully steal the credit for improvements he had not the intelligence to dream of. Simpson would know that Orton knew more than the foreman; would be quick to guess that the foreman's inspirations came from another than the foreman's brain. Orton could afford to laugh at Callin. Callin was just one of the tests of his patience, part of his new job.

And Orton went to work with all his wonted enthusiasm. In spite of hindrances deliberately put in his way by the foreman, he could turn out work better and faster than any of the rest of the dozen men in the big fourth-floor room.

Simpson was up on the floor again in the afternoon of Orton's first day. This time he spoke to his new man:

"Everything all right?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," Orton replied brightly, though Callin had just subjected him to another unreasonable and profane upbraiding. Orton's code for dealing with a fellow workman had to come from the days before Orton had a business of his own, and those were almost entirely his school-days. That code forbade tattling.

Two days convinced him that Callin did not dare to discharge him, at all events not without some unusually good excuse. It also convinced him that Callin would do all in his power to get out of the way a workman too obviously more capable than himself, by making things intolerable for that workman.

Tools disappeared from their places; Orton was accused of mislaying them. He was called away from tasks at critical moments, ostensibly to help some fellow worker; then he was reprimanded gruffly and loudly for dallying over the original work he had left. And Callin managed to find fault with practically every piece of work Orton turned out.

Twice before the week was ended Orton had lost his temper and did enough back-talking to warrant his being discharged summarily. But mostly he kept himself in hand to an extent of which he had not believed himself capable. He was schooling himself to keep in mind that he would have opportunity for revenge later.

"He's done about all he could do," Orton

decided as he drew his pay on Saturday noon. "I guess I can stand it."

But he had no idea of the resources of the class of foreman Callin typed, and he forgot his own inability to stand continued irritations.

On Thursday of the second week Callin pointed to a pile of gears not one of which Orton had touched. They had just been returned from the assembling room below.

"The boss says that you'll have to turn out better stuff than that," Callin snarled. "The company hasn't any money to throw away on workmen that has to do things two or three times over."

Orton did not believe that Callin had dared to accuse him of being the maker of the faulty wheels; but the idea startled him into a burst of "cussing back" such as he had managed to keep down through the previous three days. Later he discovered that Simpson was watching him carefully while he tooled a similar wheel.

The manager turned away without any comment. And Orton was not so sure that Callin had not started the task of providing himself with future justification for a discharge.

Still another difficulty was easily devised. On Saturday morning, while Callin was busy elsewhere in the room, Orton was working with the rapidity he had learned to use when the foreman left him alone.

"Say," a voice snarled in his ear, "what the—are you trying to do—get us all on piecework? You think you're such a darn smart-aleck turnin' out more work than everybody else. You'll find out where you get off pretty soon."

And Orton knew that his fellow workers were being incited against him. His quick sensitiveness was prepared to notice from then on that he was not accepted into the easy free-masonry of the rest. None of them took occasion to pass a jest with him as they did with the others.

Shortly before noon he had occasion to get a tool from a bench beside which two of them were stealing a moment's idleness. There was an obvious break in their talk as he approached. They eyed him coldly, if not hostilely, separated, and went back to their tasks.

It was characteristic of Orton to give himself up to new work to the exclusion of everything else. It would have been better for him had he taken all that was left of his wages after settling for his board and

hired a motor-boat or an automobile or "blown" it in any other foolish, amusing manner.

He tried to get satisfaction, instead, out of the idea of putting fifteen dollars to his credit in the bank. And he went back to work that second Monday wondering and distinctly uncertain as to whether he would get through the week without a fight that would cost him his job.

To his great relief, he was shifted to another foreman to take the place of some mechanic who had the periodic-spree habit. McCarthy was of the easy-going type. He encouraged Orton to do all his best. At the same time he saw to it that no dissatisfaction arose amongst the other men, by getting credit for the room rather than giving it to the individual, for the sudden increase produced by Orton's now eager industry.

The results were not wholly satisfactory to Orton. Mr. Simpson had spoken scarcely two words to him up-stairs; he had no more to say of approbation or criticism now. Orton would have been glad of a few hints about the time when promotion was likely, or at least some notice of his own individual capability.

At the end of the fourth week in November, the third of Orton's work under McCarthy, as he was passing out of the building, he heard his name called by the boss. His spirits leaped at the sound.

"How are you finding it?" he was asked easily.

"All right," he responded readily. "We must be turning out a good many more Orton Cars than I expected to by this time," he added, not wholly unconscious of the good impression to be made by a show of general interest in the welfare of the concern.

"Not so many more than you could have turned out," Simpson responded. "Do you know that it has been the policy of the company never to add any capital? What you see here is supposed to be built up entirely from the business itself as you left it. That is, no more money has been allowed it than it had a sound credit basis for borrowing.

"I think myself that has been stretched a little to erect this building. The head of the company is a banker, and I'm inclined to feel that his prejudices overestimated the value of this plant in loaning it enough for this enlargement. But I don't know but

you had enough pull with Mr. Atherton and his banking interests to have got as much out of him."

Orton fell silent. Of no use to express the belief that he was about the last person who could have pulled anything out of Mr. Atherton. Of no use to discuss or invent reasons why he could never have got this result.

"What was the trouble with you and Callin?" Simpson suddenly changed the subject to ask.

Orton hesitated but an instant for a reply. The schoolboy's first commandment, "Thou shalt not tattle," was sufficient direction as to the nature of the reply. Simpson might criticize his business failure; he would not find him a trouble carrier.

"Oh, Callin's all right," he said with affected ease.

And Simpson bit off the end of a cigar instead of saying more, then turned back into his office.

Orton went home not wholly crestfallen over the lesson the manager had pointed as to his own failure. He did not expect Simpson to make him president of the company, knew that Simpson could not do it. Enough that Simpson was seeing in him a man who could work for a chance of promotion.

But on Monday morning he would have chucked all his schoolboy ideals into the scrap-heap to have back the opportunity Simpson had given him to tell the truth about Callin. McCarthy greeted him with—

"You're to go back to Callin. And I'm dommed sorry to lose you; I'll say that much. I believe in givin' credit to them that's deservin' of it. If I wasn't leavin' myself at the end of the week, I'd be after makin' a kick to hold you, boy."

And Orton went up to receive a different greeting—

"I thought I was clear of you. I'll tell you one thing right here and now: You're goin' to do mighty different work from what you been doin', or I'll clear you out of the shop."

One hope animated Orton through that week. He would certainly be McCarthy's successor. It was a hope that was to receive a sad jolt at the beginning of the next week.

Orton went down to the factory fifteen minutes early on Monday morning. He lingered about the front of the building

until the whistle sent into his heart a chilling certainty that Simpson was too late in arriving for telling him of his appointment to the foremanship.

He was still not entirely without hope. He worked with his eye on the elevator door. At ten minutes of eight his heart nearly turned a somersault as the door opened and the manager bustled into the room.

Ten minutes later it seemed that his heart had merely tumbled. He clutched at the workbench for support and used his free hand to brush the mist from his eyes. Simpson had gone without a word or glance in his direction.

"Well," snarled the voice of the foreman, "ain't you got nothing to do but stand and look around the room?"

"Oh, go to the devil!" Orton snapped hotly.

"What's that?" shouted the foreman.

"Go to the devil!" Orton fairly screamed, his face ablaze.

"Say, that'll be about all from you," Callin announced hotly. "I'm going to find out who's boss around this place. You go or I go, and blame quick."

He stalked to the elevator.

Five minutes later he was back with Mr. Simpson. Simpson's face wore a worried look.

"What's this you've been calling Mr. Callin?" he asked.

"I didn't call him anything," Orton replied. "I just told him to go to the devil."

"Um-m-m-m." It was obvious that Callin had added color to his version of the language used. "Do you think that's a proper way to talk to a foreman?" Simpson asked quietly.

"I think it depends a little bit on the foreman," Orton answered, too angry to give full consideration to consequences.

"Um-m-m-m," Simpson hummed again. "Well, I guess we'd better give him another chance, Callin. But you must be careful, Orton. Remember that Mr. Callin is in charge of the floor. And swearing is against the rules of the shop. Don't let us have anything like this again, please."

He was gone before Orton could recover his astonishment to reply. He spent the rest of the morning on the edge of walking out of the place. Only one thing restrained him. He wanted time to think it all out. He had been learning self-discipline under Callin.

At noon he made a quick trip to the Federal Trust Company's bank, as had become his habit, to put in his weekly fifteen dollars which he received too late to deposit on Saturday noons. It was one of his natural bits of carelessness never to use his bank-book. Duplicate slips were made out for the deposit and one served as receipt for it. Seldom, even when he had money in the bank, had he even troubled to examine his monthly statements, trusting rather in the stubs of his check-book.

To-day, however, he noticed the sign at the rear of the bank—"Statements Now Ready." He recalled that it was his first visit since the beginning of December.

Still half dazed with the disappointments of the morning, still weighing, in a mind unfit for careful thinking, the pros and cons of making this the last day in the new factory of the Orton Car Company, he glanced at the yellow sheet on which his month's account was written. He felt that his balance in the bank ought to count in his inward debating.

"Say," he cried an instant later, "what's the matter with you fellows?"

"Anything wrong?" suavely asked the clerk.

"Nothing that I could complain of much," Orton answered with a laugh. "You've got me down here for nine hundred and twenty-five dollars."

"Well, what's the matter with that?"

"Nothing at all," Orton repeated. "Only I've deposited just seventy-five dollars since I last drew myself down to thirty-eight cents."

The clerk picked up the receiver of the telephone on the desk beside him. He spoke a few words, waited, spoke again with a nod.

"He says it's all right, Mr. Orton," he reported.

"But—but—when was all this deposited? I don't know anything about it," Orton insisted.

There was more telephoning and more waiting.

"Why," the clerk now explained, "there are two deposits—one for a hundred on September twenty-fourth; the other for eight hundred and fifty on September twenty-ninth. You don't mean to say you make money so easily you can't keep track of little things like eight or nine hundred dollars?"

But Orton did not reply. He knew now

that Arlene had found some way to get the price of her car deposited to his credit. A moment he thought only of writing a desk-check for the amount and mailing it to her. Another moment showed him there was no real excuse for doing so.

He must keep the money. Any other course would now be an affront to Arlene.

This realization brought him to another that burst from his lips in an exclamation of relief:

"Great Scott! And to think of staying to listen to Callin's guff with nine hundred dollars in the bank!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BLOW-UP.

FORTUNATELY Callin refrained from pushing his advantage during that Monday afternoon. There was so little left of Orton's desire for time to sleep over a decision before making it that a word from the bullying foreman would have ended things in a brief and merry fight. Callin was planning another finish, and Orton reserved his decision.

Rather he reserved the execution of his decision. He had already worked out an entire program which began with thrashing one James Callin and ended in a nifty garage and repair shop with a lively business growing livelier all the time under the direction and through the energy—well, the energy Orton always put into the beginning of a new business and always imagined he was going to keep on putting into it.

He reached the boarding-house whistling merrily. He took the three flights of stairs two steps at a jump. When Orton was cheerful, he was very, very cheerful. He switched on the light.

A letter lay upon his table. Orton stared at it hard. There could be no doubt about it. It was from Arlene.

Somehow his spirits sank. The rosy plan seemed interfered with by this little bit of communication from the girl who had got him his present job, who believed he was going to stick to it, to make good at it.

Orton ripped open the envelope and read the note. As he finished he sighed almost loudly enough to make the sigh a groan.

DEAR HARDY:

Have just collected a bet. Father wouldn't pay me until he had a chance to learn from Mr. Simpson that it was really true. He had

bet fifty dollars you wouldn't stick at the factory a month. Since you won the money for me, aren't we still good enough friends so that you can come over to-morrow evening and plan some way that we can "blow" it together?
Yours, ARLENE.

Orton stood a moment, staring at the letter. Then, slowly, he drew off his overcoat. As he did so the weight of a wrench in its pocket reminded him of a little job he had promised to do for Mrs. Burney, who had complained that several faucets were leaking extensive additions to her quarterly water-bill. He had taken the wrench from his tool-kit at the shop when he first arrived that morning and put it in his coat lest he forget it during the day.

He was glad now of the job. Somehow he had got all over wanting to think.

And yet he could not help thinking as he replaced the worn washers on the leaky faucets. Arlene betting on his constancy to the new job! Arlene asking him to spend one evening in planning another with her! Arlene loving him yet—it could mean nothing else.

He had not pretended to himself that he had attained any success in forgetting his love for her. He could not pretend now that he did not want to go to see her to-morrow evening rather more than he could possibly wish for anything else in the world.

It occurred to him that Arlene must have supposed he had spent the eight hundred and fifty dollars on the afternoon when she saw him recovering from his little spree on the bench in Military Park. She must have thought him a prodigal of dissipation.

And yet she wanted now to see him! All the more he wanted to see her.

But he could not see her—not if he left the factory to-morrow, not if he planned to leave it within a week, a month, at all. Her invitation was the reward for sticking. He had done about all the bluffing he had any right to do with Arlene Atherton.

No, if he chucked that job to-morrow, he must give up all hope of ever marrying Arlene, of even calling her his friend. He discovered suddenly that he was a long way from having wholly given up the first hope.

His mind turned to the bright plans of the new garage to be. Somehow they had lost their glamour. He tried to think of going on and working under Callin's curses

and epithets and abuse. This had lost none of its distastefulness. Rather it seemed worse than ever. It had suddenly gained the loathsomeness anything had for Orton from which he could not seem to get away.

Yet this was the thing Arlene wanted. She was not asking him to get rich, to match her wealth with money of his own, before she could accept his friendship again. She was practically offering to wait for his success. All she asked was that he stick to one job long enough to show that he had the stamina which was part of the capacity for success.

All she asks, he put it to himself in a moment of resentment, is the privilege of dictating how I succeed.

There was an instant answer. Certainly Arlene had, by her faithfulness beyond all his deserts, won some right to dictate.

There was another answer. Arlene was right. Her way was right.

He had been proving for six unsuccessful years that he was wrong. He could look back over the whole long succession of changes without finding one by which he had not lost.

And there was not one single instance where the job he had given up had not looked to him utterly bad; the job he had taken seemed utterly good. He had thought it was the jobs; now he knew it was he who was to blame for the whole wretched mess he had made of his affairs.

But the present instance? Was there real hope of advancement? Was the prospect of superintending a factory as good as that of managing even a small commencement of a business of his own?

"Hardy," he answered himself with sudden conviction, "you haven't sense enough to judge about that. You're just weak-minded enough so that any new job looks better than any old one in the world. The mere fact that a change looks good to you is considerable evidence that you'd better not make it. You darned big fool, suppose you satisfy that little love of novelty by giving it the entirely untried sensation of sticking something out."

And Orton went back to the Orton Car Company's factory in the morning with all the enthusiasm he usually felt for a new job. Temperamental—sentimental—maybe he could have kept it up, maybe not. The fates had things in store for him.

Owing to a slight delay on the ride down

Market street he was a minute late in reaching the shop. He hurried to the closet as he drew off his coat. He carried the wrench from its pocket up in the elevator, but dropped it on the bench where he had been working last night.

His own chest of tools was at the farther end of the room. His fresh enthusiasm wanted to get down to work; he could take the wrench over when he happened to be going that way.

He was almost sorry that Callin did not take occasion to abuse him for his tardiness. He wanted to prove to himself the strength of his fresh resolves not to let Callin annoy him.

Callin had eyed him sharply as he entered, had made as if to follow him to his bench; but had thought better of it apparently. He did not come near for the three hours Orton remained busy at his work.

At the end of that time Orton wanted a pair of calipers. He started for his tool-chest, which contained one. His eyes fell upon the wrench. He picked it up, carried it over, placed it in his box, began to rummage a compartment for the calipers.

"What's that you're putting in your chest?"

Orton had seen Callin on the other side of the room as he started. Even the rubber heels the foreman always wore did not account for his presence at Orton's back unless the man had run. The bellowed query had its intended effect of startling Orton.

"My wrench," Hardy answered, after drawing a breath. And he became aware that the other men on the floor were approaching.

"Your wrench, eh?" snarled Callin, stooping over Orton's chest. "Your wrench, eh?" he repeated, drawing out the tool Orton had just placed there. "Now, you ———— thief, you go down and get your time and get out of here quick, or I'll—"

He was holding the wrench aloft, the iron butt of its handle displayed to the gaze of the men. On it was sharply cut the initials that marked every tool belonging to the house.

It was a common enough variety of wrench. "I must have made a mistake," Orton said quietly. "There's a wrench of mine about exactly like that one. I'll find it and show it to you if—"

"A mistake, eh? And here's another mis-

take—and another. These pliers are some more mistake—and these thread dies—and—” One by one he hurled them out on the floor. They were exact or almost exact duplicates of Orton’s own tools; but they, too, bore the chiseled “O.C.C.” of the house.

And Orton saw the trap. His tools had been taken out and replaced from the stock of the factory. Callin had waited then until Orton should put one of them back without noticing its mark. Purposely he had kept away from Orton’s bench all morning to keep clear of any possible accusation of changing the wrench on the desk. Other evidence of his cunning was forthcoming.

“Ah, here’s one that ain’t a mistake,” he snarled, tossing back a pair of Orton’s own nippers. “And this is his, too. But here’s another little blunder. And here—I suppose you had a die just made to cut you the third-speed cog. Yours is somewhere around. Another mistake.”

Callin got up and held aloft this last find from the bottom of the chest.

“Well, boys, I guess you saw him put the wrench in. You see the other mistakes. Now you, will you go get your time, or shall I call the police?”

Orton’s head was swimming. There was a trace of fear—there was an ocean of sheer rage.

“I’ll not get my time,” he said hotly. “And by the eternal, if you call any police, they’ll have to take you to a hospital before they take me to the court-house.”

Calmly Callin picked up the heaviest wrench in the chest.

“Oh, I don’t care a hang whether you get your time or not. I’ll see that you’re not paid for any more time,” he said coolly. “This is evidence enough to show even Simpson whether his smart little pet is a blank, blanked thief.”

An instant Orton regarded the man in utter fury. It would be worse than madness to attack him with that heavy wrench in one hand and a die neatly ringed over three fingers of the other. He was fired. Callin had fired him!

His total impotence overcame him. He burst into the language of the streets, the language of the gutters, the language of pirates and stevedores and thugs, the language of garages the world over.

Half of it was intended to arouse in Callin such wrath as would demand even

from his craven nature a fair fight without the deadly weapons he might dare use in self-defense but hardly in attack; the other half was mostly the expression of rage at defeat.

“Fire me, will you?” he managed to bluster, though without any hope of being able to make good his blustering. “Fire me, you—” His speech only added to his fury. He was on the verge of hysteria.

“You won’t fire me,” he suddenly shrieked. “I’m going to hold this job. I tell you, I won’t be fired. You can’t do it. I—”

“Oh, I’ll fire you, you damned thief.” Callin spoke loud enough to overcome Orton’s top-pitched yelling.

It was the third time he had used the word “thief.” Orton forgot the upraised wrench, the die. He leaped forward.

“You’re fired!”

The words had come from behind Orton. The voice that spoke them gave them a tensivity of force that was greater than all the curses Orton had spoken or could ever have invented in his life. They seemed to halt him in the midst of a step, to take the strength from his arms.

He wheeled about to face the man who had spoken. What the two sharp words had not done to take from him his last ounce of strength and to turn him into a veritable rag of a man, was accomplished by what he saw.

It seemed that the other men gathered about had hidden them from the view of Callin as well, at least until he spoke his last threat and accusation. How long they had been there Orton could not begin to guess.

But there they were—Mr. Simpson, Mr. Anson P. Atherton—and Arlene. Only Arlene, with cheeks aflame and blood-red ears stopped with her fingers, was hurrying back to the head of the stairs and did not turn to look again as her little heels made the only sound to be heard all the way to the floor below and around out of earshot on to the next flight.

Orton had lost his job. He had lost Arlene. He would never dare show her his face after what she had heard him say. At least he could spare himself the humiliation of further lecturing.

He started for the elevator door at the opposite end of the building. Whether he jumped down or rode down would be pretty much a matter of the position of the

elevator when he got there. He didn't care which he did.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ORTON CAR COMPANY.

"COME back here, Orton; where are you going?"

It was Atherton's voice. It was gentle, kindly, almost affectionate. Orton paused and looked back fearfully.

"I didn't fire you," Atherton continued. "But this bully is going to get out of here before I pitch him out of a window."

"He's a thief," Callin cried desperately. "I'll prove—"

"Stop your noise," Atherton ordered roughly. "I know whether Orton's a thief or not. How long have you had him under that fellow, Simpson?"

"This is the fourth week, Mr. Atherton," Simpson replied; which gave Orton rather the better of it in the matter of time.

"Well, I should say each week under him was worth about a year under any human being, wouldn't you?" Atherton asked, with a little of his old bluff humor returning to his voice. "That would put him about two years and a half ahead of our schedule if we acted right now, wouldn't it?" he asked further, without waiting for a reply.

"I didn't think Callin was quite such a ruffian," Simpson responded.

"Say," Atherton snapped at the foreman, "how long does it take you to move? We've other business to attend to. Do you want a policeman to help you?"

Callin got up limply, picked out one of the tool-chests.

"Never mind any mistakes you've made, Callin—get yourself and your box out of here."

In spite of the mysterious upward turn of things, Orton's heart sank at this indication of the fact that all the quarrel had been overheard.

Atherton, Simpson, and Orton waited until Callin had shouldered the box. They followed him to the elevator. At the bottom of the shaft Atherton handed over a ten dollar bill to the ex-foreman.

"That'll cover your time, I guess," he snapped, and indicated the outside door with an impatient jerk of his head.

"Now, we'll talk things over," he announced, leading the way into the office.

And Orton sat down to learn his fate.

"First of all, I suppose I'd better explain to Hardy here that I'm all there is to the Orton Car Company, except a few dummies to make the thing legal. It was I who bought you out for a song last July. I'm going to tell you exactly why I did it. I did it to get you out of Arlene's way.

"And I wanted to get you out of Arlene's way because I'd made up my mind that you'd never stick to anything long enough to get anywhere. Pretty mean of me, wasn't it? But she's the only daughter I own. I didn't want her to get stuck with the wrong sort of man.

"I was meaner than that. I put Arlene up to that little motorboat stunt down at Atlantic City. I figured I'd break you so badly you'd have to get down to solid business or quit bothering Arlene. Arlene consented when I managed to prove to her that it was all for your own good.

"But that didn't seem to cure you or Arlene, either. When I ran into Polhemus one day at the club and found out just what a bluff your whole job with him had been, I got desperate. And we had that little scene up at the house.

"Mind, I didn't have anything against you. I never did think you were after Arlene's money. But I wasn't sure how far you'd get away with her money and your eternal unsteadiness. I even figured that the bluff was just to keep Arlene from knowing that she had been right in wanting you to stick to the making of the cars.

"Well, after that unpleasant little episode I thought I was through with you, until about six weeks ago, when Arlene ran into you in the park. Then we got together on a scheme.

"I got her to promise she'd forget you, got her to say she'd give up all hope of you, if we put you in here and you didn't stay. If you stuck out two months, you were to be made a foreman. If you made good as a foreman you were to have the superintendency at the end of six months more. And you were to be made the general manager of the business at the year's end if you handled the factory successfully.

"Well, there you are. Now, Mr. Simpson upsets the scheme. He has a sudden offer that I can't quite cover. He's going in two weeks. I think, however, that the time you've put in under Callin makes up in intensity of misery for quite a quantity of other time. Anyhow, I'm going to give you the chance.

"There's one more point about the scheme as I promised it to Arlene. Of course, for the present, you'll be under a salary, and I'm only going to give you five thousand a year. For one year, you've an option to buy the whole business for two thousand dollars. I really think it's worth ten times what it was worth when you sold it to me for two hundred."

Orton laughed. "Why, I've got nearly a thousand now. I'll take a half interest—"

"You've got a thousand now?" Atherton asked in astonishment.

"Yes—I never knew until yesterday that Arlene had deposited the price of the car in the bank to my credit."

"Oh," Atherton came back with a laugh of his own, "that won't go now. Engagement presents are all on again, I suppose."

And Orton's gaiety and joy sank again to zero. "I'm afraid not, after the language she heard up-stairs."

"Um-m-m," Atherton hummed. "It was some language. I'm not sure, but I'll get rid of you as a son-in-law yet. Well—I've got to hurry to a directors' meeting. Good-by."

"Er—I haven't thanked you, Mr. Atherton," Orton suddenly remembered. "I—oh, good Lord! Why don't they have some nice words as strong as the other kind. I can't cuss thanks."

"No—and you'd better apologize to Arlene for some of your other cussing," Atherton admonished.

Orton followed him out to the car, where Arlene was waiting. But the girl regarded him with cold eyes and a look of indignation he had never seen on her face before.

"I thought you were a gentleman," she said frigidly, and gave the chauffeur the command to start.

Orton spent the rest of the day with Simpson. Over and over he tried to pull himself together, to rouse himself to some interest in the business he must learn in a fortnight. Was he, he asked himself, utterly incapable of maintaining enthusiasm for one thing?

He shook his head. He had lost Arlene.

No penitence could blot out this offense. A profane man may quit swearing from religious motives or others. The kind of gentleman Arlene had believed Orton never has to quit swearing for any motive.

"Say, old man, I guess I'd better finish this little lesson to-morrow. You don't

seem to be up to yourself. I've another important engagement I intended to cut; but I guess I may as well keep it." Simpson spoke with a trace of irritation in his tone.

"I—I'm sorry," Orton responded gloomily.

"I've just time to make it," Simpson said with more irritation. "Good afternoon."

Orton sat dully staring at long rows of figures, piles of papers. The engineer blew the whistle. Orton heard the men stamping their way out into the early darkness. The stenographer vanished from the room.

He sat on. No, he would not give up now—not even for this afternoon. Arlene should find out that she had not wrought in vain to redeem him from his changeableness and lack of perseverance. He would keep on—and keep on—and keep on—even if her proud, disappointed, disdainful face persisted in coming between him and the figures all night.

"Say, mister!"

It was the watchman, who had never seen Orton in the place before.

"There's a messenger boy outside with a letter for Mr. Orton. It don't be for you, does it?"

Orton made a two days' job of assorting papers for himself in his rush to get to that boy. The boy went off with a dollar of his hard-earned money. Orton came back to the light in the office.

DEAR HARDY:

Please pardon me for being so harsh this morning. I—well, I was rather shocked at what you said to that man. I never dreamed that gentlemen used such language. But—what do you think?

I happened to be in my room when father lost a collar button a few minutes ago. And—I hope you'll never learn all the things he said. So I suppose I'll have to forgive you after all. Won't you try to get over to talk about spending that bet?

Orton gave a hasty, rueful glance at the mess of papers. Then he pulled the roll top of the desk down over them with a bang.

"I'm afraid I'm not going to stick out the night after all," he muttered, chuckling. "Bless the scheming old rascal's heart. I don't believe he ever said damn before in his life. George! I'm going to get up Forest Hill yet. But I've been mixed up for fair on my controls. This low speed is the high after all."

NERVE



by

Arnold Hofmann

"CHOKE it, Kid, there ain't no use pulling that cheer-up bunk," Eddie Donovan spoke with a heavy frown on his florid face. "The fight game's as dead as a kippered herring, and you know it. I ain't managed hopes for fifteen years without learning something, and take it from me, Kid, I know a funeral march when I hear it."

Kid McCarren, trainer and custodian of the West Side Athletic Club, eyed the goblet of cool beer on the table before him and then looked across the street.

"One Round Higgin blew the tire," sighed the Kid regretfully. "He's too good."

"Now you're handing out the lingo, boy," replied Donovan, with some show of animation. "He's too good and he's too all fired stuck on himself to lay down. O. R. is the greatest heavyweight champion that ever put on a pair of gloves. There ain't a man between here and Halleluiah who's been able to stand up with him more than a round or two, and the fight bugs are next.

"They've got tired of slapping down ten or fifteen iron men to see a three-minute tussle, and you can't get 'em out any more when O. R. is on the program. They'll pay to see him work out behind the footlights with a burlesque show, but they don't want to see him fight because we can't put up a boy who'll give 'em a run for their dough.

"And take it from me, the bugs study the dope these days. You can't put over any more of this 'come back' stuff. They're on. They've got the record and pedigree of every fighter in the game, and they know none of 'em can dodge O. R.'s terrible right for more than one round. They've stood for about a dozen trying it, and now they're off. The promoters are frozen stiff and you can't blame 'em."

"If we could get O. R. to hand down the belt to somebody else," mused the Kid.

Donovan bit his cigar savagely.

"Or if we could coax Pierrepont Morgan to trade his job for a second-hand store," he growled through his teeth. "One bet is as good as another. The only thing to do is to get hold of a boy that can put it over O. R."

"It can't be done," replied the Kid. "There's nothing to do but wait until O. R. gets old and stale, and that'll be a long time."

"Longer than I can sit on the bank and wait for the cork to be jerked under," said Donovan. "I tell you, Kid," he sighed, with visions of the expensive upkeep of the latest Mrs. Donovan, "it takes money to live."

With that he lapsed into sombre silence.

The Kid partook of a sip of beer without the customary prelude of spilling the foam into the cuspidor, and followed suit.

Upon this scene of desolation entered one Tobias Brewer, late of Nameless Creek, Arkansas; trusting Tobias Brewer, the victim of an unscrupulous employment agency, having spent his last dollar on the rosy promise of riches easily won in the large city; unfortunate Tobias Brewer, who after wandering endless miles through the streets in an aimless quest for a job was even now the innocent victim of a practical joke; guileless Tobias Brewer, wearing (incredible but true) leather boots with faded blue overalls thrust into them, a more badly faded blue shirt and a pale pink, ready-made four-in-hand tie that sagged sufficiently to permit a view of the nickel-plated, collapsible-pronged collar button that held the celluloid collar in place.

At the summit of his six feet three hung a broad-brimmed, coarsely woven straw hat of the variety commonly known in the West as hayseed.

The great bulk of raw manhood darkened the doorway without attracting the attention of the two men plunged in gloom at the table. Even when he advanced toward them with his heavy awkward stride his presence was unnoticed.

Abashed at the unresponsive reception, Tobias Brewer paused in uncertainty, waved a sticky fly from his face a few times and at last, summoning up sufficient courage, asked innocently:

"Is either of you gents Mr. Jim Nastic?"

The two men at the table looked up in speechless astonishment.

"It may be as you can tell me where I can find him, then," continued Tobias Brewer. "A feller I run across down the street—right smart-lookin' feller he was, too—told me to come in here and ask for Mr. Jim Nastic and likely he'd give me a job a-curryin' the horses."

Again Tobias Brewer got no answer. But this time not because he had failed to impel recognition. Gloom was dispelled by a roar of laughter that set the windows rattling.

"Look at 't, Eddie! Look at it!" screeched the Kid, rocking back and forth in a convulsion of mirth. "It's *alive*!"

Tenderness was not an altogether unknown quality of the heart that beat laboriously inside Donovan's fat chest. After the first roar of uncontrollable laughter he began to "feel for the rube" and refrained from unkind remarks.

But the Kid was an extremist. As usual, he waxed over-enthusiastic.

"They haven't got anything like that in the Bronx Zoo," he cried, brushing the tears from his eyes. "It's the biggest prize in captivity. I've got to get a good look at it before I wake up."

With that he approached Tobias Brewer with an exaggerated expression of assumed awe and mirth.

Now it cannot be denied that Tobias Brewer fell an easy victim to a joke as old as the human race, but Tobias Brewer, although an artless, unsophisticated son of Nature, was not 100 per cent. fool. He was quick to resent an insult and he was painfully aware now of the predicament into which he had tumbled, though the true status of Mr. Jim Nastic still puzzled him.

When the Kid, who was almost a foot shorter than his elected victim, had approached within arm's length, Tobias Brewer suddenly reached out and, seizing the trainer by the shoulders, lifted him, without any apparent effort, so that their faces were on a level and not more than two inches apart.

"I thought as maybe you could see better thisa way," he remarked. "Take a good look while you're at it, 'cause I'm a-goin' to give you another chance to act funny in a minute."

That minute was the shortest the Kid had ever experienced; the next second, however, was the longest as he shot out of Tobias Brewer's arms, his body describing an arch, the further base of which terminated on the floor in a distant corner of the room.

The Kid no longer had need to feign amazement now, but that was swallowed up in an uncontrollable rage—a fiendish frenzy born of the bitterest humiliation.

He was still dazed from the impact when he leaped from the floor and dashed wildly toward the innocent man from Nameless Creek, Arkansas.

In a boxing match the Kid would have used his head, no matter how mercilessly he was being punished, but now the whole room flashed red, and rage guided him.

Like a flaming arrow he launched himself at his man. The next instant the Kid's face and the hard knuckles of Tobias Brewer's fist met and the Kid dropped to the floor inert, as an arrow shot against two-inch armor plate.

That was the temporary turning point in

Tobias Brewer's career. The blow that extinguished consciousness in the Kid ignited an inspiration in Donovan.

The Kid's world went black; Donovan's was suddenly flooded with a rosy glow. The uncouth man before him seemed as an angel sent in answer to a prayer—a *Lohen-grin* answering the appeal of *Elsa*. There was no ridicule in the fight manager's heart now.

To the waiter and attendants who rushed in, attracted by the commotion, Donovan said: "The Kid has met with an accident. Tried to do the Charlie Chaplin walk for the benefit of my friend here, and fell on his face. Nothing serious. It's all in a day's work. Douse him with a little water and he'll be all right."

To Tobias Brewer, as he grasped his arm and led him solicitously out of the door, he whispered: "I'm your friend. Come along and I'll get you out of this before the police arrive."

And Tobias Brewer, his indignation cooled, was glad enough to go.

Not until he had closed the door of a back room in a saloon three blocks away did Donovan pause for breath. Then he offered Brewer a cigar and a chair and got down to business without delay.

"Say," he asked in low, impressive tones, "how would you like to make ten thousand dollars?"

Contrary to Donovan's expectations, Tobias Brewer answered with a doubtful look and shook his head.

"I know your kind," he answered significantly, "the rich dude with the seegar that hires the poor workman to pitch the beautiful lady in the river. My brother Ezra went to a the-ate-ter in Little Rock onct and he told me all about it. No siree, ten million wouldn't hire me for no dirty work."

"You've got the wrong number; listen," interposed Donovan impatiently.

But Brewer was a man of a single purpose.

"I've got a girl back there in Arkansaw," he continued stubbornly, "and if I can't make enough money here to marry her, I can go back and show her empty pockets and an honest heart."

"For the love of Jerusalem, listen to me!" pleaded Donovan. "We're not pulling off any Nellie the Beautiful Cloak Model stuff here, Hiram. I'm trying to put you next to making ten thousand dollars in an

honest way. You don't get your money until you've done your work, so you don't have to do it if it goes against your religious principles. Wouldn't you like to go back to that girl of yours with ten thousand honestly earned silver dollars jingling in your pockets?"

Brewer's eyes began to kindle with eagerness now.

"Golly," he gulped. "How many years will I have to work?"

"One night!" snapped Donovan.

"One—say, brother, you hain't likely to be a-lösin' your mind, are you?" gasped Brewer.

"Not on your haystack. It's straight goods. Ten thousand in one night!"

Tobias Brewer struggled a full minute for expression before he was able to gulp out the one word: "How?"

"Fighting," answered Donovan.

"Fighting? The war you mean?"

"No. No getting killed in this. All you've got to do is to fight a man with gloves on for half an hour or so and you get ten thousand, win or lose. Get me?"

Brewer was on fire now. He rose with balled fists and squared himself.

"Bring him on," he cried. "I'm ready right now. Who is it? The little runt I flattened out a while ago?"

Donovan jumped up with a joyous laugh.

"Never mind who; I'll tell you about that later. The fight won't be for about two months. In the meantime I'll pay all your expenses and foot your chewing tobacco bills besides. We'll go right out and find you a good rooming place now!"

Thus a new hope was born, and Eddie Donovan saw riches rolling his way once more.

The mighty One Round Higgin was not averse to the match when the full significance of it was explained by Donovan. Though he realized that he had killed the goose that laid the golden egg by finishing off the title aspirants in one or two rounds, yet there was a certain inborn pig-headed pride about him that would not allow him voluntarily to lengthen a fight in order to give the spectators a run for their money.

His method was to attack immediately with an overwhelming ferocity that, in nearly every instance, filled his adversary with dreadful amazement, and its attendant impotency. Then, at the psychological moment, when he had his victim thoroughly mystified or hypnotized, as some insisted,

he would bring his famous solar plexus into play and follow it up with a terrific uppercut to the jaw.

The combination never failed.

But the mighty Higgin was fond of money. He needed a lot of it for his automobiles, his hotel bills, his lavish entertainments, diamonds, flashy clothes and endless extravagances, and if he could make his fortune without compromising his one round reputation, which he prized above all else in the world, he was more than willing to accept the offer. So the match was arranged.

As to what might happen to Tobias Brewer a second or so after the initial gong sounded, that was not concerning Donovan. He was not counting on Brewer's fighting ability, but on the chances that the novelty of the thing would appeal to the sporting blood of the public.

Donovan was not developing a champion; he was trying to make money. He was staging a trick that he could not hope to engineer a second time if it succeeded once, which was not at all certain.

But Donovan in his enthusiasm never considered failure, and laid his plans with the broad vision and thoroughness of a Napoleon.

"From now on," he told Tobias Brewer, "your name isn't Tobias Brewer, get me? Nobody wants to see a fellow fight with a name like that. Just forget it. You've never heard it. See? From now on your name is Jim Fist, the Arkansaw Mountain Lion. Fist is a great name for a fighter, and it ain't overworked. It'll appeal to the fans. They won't forget it. And remember you've pummeled the tar out of every bully in the State with one hand tied behind you. Get me?"

"Seems to me as that's goin' a little strong," interposed Brewer. "I did useta lick every lad in school, though, now that I come to think on it. One feller in particular, he was that—"

"Well, just remember those kids have grown up now," interrupted Donovan. "You've licked 'em all. Get me? But the best stunt is for you to keep your mouth locked. Do as little talking as you can. If you have to spout at all, spout big. Are you on?"

"All right," said the newly christened Mountain Lion dubiously. "I had them there kids buffaloed, but I'll tell it different." Then after a thoughtful pause:

"Say, by the way, who am I a-goin' to fight, anyhow?"

Donovan stroked his chin.

"We'll find somebody when the time comes," he answered evasively. "Don't you worry about that. What we're after now is to get you before the public."

Donovan's instructions to the Kid—promises of riches having effected a reconciliation whereby the Kid became the Mountain Lion's body-guard, trainer and watch-dog—were more specific.

"Now before we spring this thing in the papers," he began, "we're going to set up our training camp in some quiet little suburban place with plenty of the old homestead atmosphere. Besides training him for all you've got, your job will be to watch that boob like a hawk every minute in the day and night. Don't let him talk to anybody that's not in on this, and if you want to live to tell about it, for the love of Mike don't let him get hold of a newspaper. The jig's up if he does. Put that down in red ink, Kid.

"I'm afraid of him. If he ever finds out that he's slated to face One Round Higgin he'll beat it out of here so fast he'll drown himself crossing the Panama Canal before we can nab him. We can't let him get wise on who he's going to fight until he sees him in the ring. After that it's his own lookout. We've got the money. At that, the boob may not know O. R. when he sees him."

"I guess you know what you're pulling off," sighed the Kid, "but I'd like to give you a tip before I buy the flowers. That poor Arkansas bum will never make a fighter in a thousand years. He's got the looks—I'll hand you that—but you ought to see him when he's working out. No speed, no control, a pile-driver punch that can't land, the footwork of a lame elephant, and gets mad when you hit him. It's hopeless, I tell you."

Donovan laughed. "Cleaned you up in pretty good shape, didn't he?"

"That's right, rub it in," growled the Kid. "I wasn't looking for it that day, that's all. I could lay him out with my lamps shut and pins tied now."

"Just leave it to me," Donovan reassured him. "You do your part and I'll do mine. If we can put it over on the sport writers we're all right, and I've got a plan that will do it."

As soon as the Mountain Lion had familiarized himself sufficiently with the

workings and customs of a training camp so that there was no fear of his mistaking the punching bag for the hat-rack, Donovan summoned a photographer and the Mountain Lion was photographed in a score of heroic postures, each one different, with the one exception that in every picture the peerless wonder's face was either averted or hidden by his arm or glove.

That was one of Donovan's strategic points in the bold campaign. The great find was to be at once a marvel and a man of mystery.

Here was a thing to appeal to the curiosity of the public, and the sport writers entered into it with enthusiasm. They had found a new angle to write about. Almost immediately the "Fist of Mystery," "The Man in the Leather Mask" and "The Faceless Fighter" took unrestricted possession of the sport columns.

So irresistible was the mystery appeal that it was not long before the woman's page welcomed it and pictures of the Mountain Lion were run over a series entitled, "Could You Love a Man Without Seeing His Face?" Even the editorial writers could not ignore such an opportunity.

It was pleasant diversion to turn for a day from the everlasting pounding for or against national defense and woman suffrage to ramble along for a few paragraphs on "The Value of a Man's Face," while the nimble-brained paragraphers constructed and reconstructed the faceless face until it became almost as widely dreaded as the Ford joke.

Thus the Mountain Lion, thanks to Donovan's genius, became famous at a single bound.

That sport writers did not put over a scoop by printing a full-face view of the new wonder secured by their own photographers was not due to a lack of enterprise; rather to a keen sense of it. To publish such a picture would have been to rob themselves of the very thing they had seized upon so eagerly—a novelty.

A few weeks of this and the public was itching to throw its money at the box office for a mere glimpse of the new fighter. Here at last was a worthy rival for the unvanquished and unconquerable One-Round Higgin!

The day set for the fight drew near and still Tobias Brewer, unaware of his fame as the mysterious Mountain Lion, did not know who his adversary would be. Having

put the question daily to Donovan for weeks and always receiving the same evasive reply, Tobias began to have a vague notion that there wasn't going to be any adversary.

Just what Donovan's game was he could not fathom, but he was being fed well and housed well, and though the daily workout was not always to his liking, it made him glow with health and strength so that his outlook became optimistic. Feeling that he might have struck much worse luck in the big city, he was content to let matters drift along as they were as long as Donovan was willing to foot the bills.

He had not been told the date of the fight, and somehow the nearer the fatal day approached the more convinced Tobias Brewer became that there wasn't going to be any fight at all.

From the large number of people that visited at the camp he conceived the idea that perhaps Donovan had made a sort of side show freak of him and was deriving his income from the admittance charges. If so he was satisfied. That promise of ten thousand dollars had been too marvelous to be true to begin with.

Tobias Brewer had had dreams of wealth before so there was no harm done if this, like the other dreams, failed to materialize. But he did not even dream that his pictures with the hidden face appeared in every newspaper of any importance and that his new name held sway in the sport columns.

Now as always he had no natural desire to read a newspaper and the Kid saw to it that none got into his hands. Time and again there had been narrow escapes, but the Kid was always on the job.

Meanwhile the illustrious One Round Higgin passed the time leisurely. He pretended to train to satisfy the sport writers, but took more interest in displaying his diamonds and enjoying his motor-cars.

He posed for innumerable photographs and visited the newspaper offices, assuring the public that he never felt more fit in his life. With a patronizing smile that displayed the diamond settings in his teeth the champion admitted that he expected the Lion to put up an interesting fight, possibly even the most interesting one in his career, but of the outcome there was no doubt. His highly prized one round reputation would not suffer, of that he was certain.

The champion's absolute confidence was

the touch that raised interest in the fight to fever heat. Reports spread like wild fire that while the Lion was working his head off, the champion in his over confidence was resting on his laurels, expecting his reputation to win the fight. And up bounded the advance sale to staggering figures.

Thus everything went smoothly until the day before the fight. Donovan sat in his room smoking an expensive cigar and thinking of the wealth that would be his within the next thirty-six hours when suddenly the door burst open and the Kid, hatless, coatless, his face ashen and his frame trembling, rushed in.

"The balloon's busted!" he groaned between gasps for breath. "The fight's off! We're out of it!"

He paused, awed by the terrible expression that came over the manager's face.

"You don't mean," cried Donovan, "that—that—he—"

"You're on," supplied the Kid. "He knows!"

"Great heavens! Who told him?" shrieked the manager.

"He—he lamped it out of a newspaper," answered the Kid.

"A newspaper!" Donovan's fists clenched as he poised himself to spring at the Kid in his mad despair. "That's your fault, you bungler," he hissed. "You poor, wall-eyed—"

"Cut it," pleaded the Kid. "Cut it. Give me a chance. I tell you it ain't my fault. You couldn't have helped it either. It's that girl of his in Arkansaw. He's been writing to her. To-day she sent him a pair of red woolen socks by mail. They were done up in a two-weeks' old newspaper. The outside wrapper was brown paper. How was I to tell? She ain't next or she wouldn't have used the newspaper for that. He spotted his picture and began to read. That's all. He's making his will now."

Without another word Donovan led the way to the Mountain Lion's room. There they found the man whose heroic figure was known in every household, pitifully huddled on a chair by the window, a pale green cast on his face, his wide open eyes staring blankly at a crumpled sheet of newspaper clutched before him in trembling hands.

He did not notice the entrance of the two men, though he sat facing them.

"What's the trouble?" asked Donovan helplessly,

The tragic figure of despair made no answer.

"Wake up here and don't tell me you've lost your nerve," shouted Donovan as he shook him wildly by both shoulders.

The Mountain Lion in name only looked up with a vacant stare as if Donovan were some ghost with whom he was making his first acquaintance. At last he found the semblance of a voice.

"The champion of the world!" he echoed as if from the grave.

"Well, what of it?" shouted Donovan with another shake.

"You've sicked me on to the champion of the world! Me fight One Round Higgin!" groaned the late Man of Mystery, now the Man of Mysery.

"Sure you're going to fight him," replied Donovan. "And you'll lick him, too," he added with a queer grimace that was meant for a smile of reassurance.

An involuntary sob shook the tortured Lion's vast frame.

"Me lick One Round Higgin?" he gasped. "The Lord have mercy, now I *know* you're bughouse."

"You might at that," half heartedly from the Kid.

The Lion cast him a pained look of infinite pity without moving his white lips.

"Well, supposing he does lick you, ain't you going to get ten thousand dollars for it?" Donovan reminded him.

"What good is ten thousand dollars to a dead man?" inquired Tobias in lifeless tones.

"Don't be a fool," Donovan argued. "You won't get killed. Nobody ever gets killed in a prize fight. You might get knocked out, but that's nothing. The best fighters can't count the number of times they've been put to sleep."

"Talk on," faltered Tobias, "I'm the one that's got to do this here sleepin'." Then, with a sudden faint ray of hope, "When is this here thing a-goin' to be?"

Donovan decided on a running jump.

"Now, listen here," he pleaded, "it ain't nearly as hopeless as you think. You ain't never seen Higgin fight; you ain't never even so much as seen his picture have you?"

Tobias shook his head.

"Well, then, how do you know you ain't a better man than he is? You're bigger and, Great Jerusalem, you wouldn't want to be any stronger than you are. Why, man, you're—"

"That hain't a-tellin' me when this here hog stickin' is a-goin' to come off," interposed Tobias dolefully.

"All right, then, let's get it over with," growled Donovan. "It's to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" cried Tobias in high falsetto tones. "To-morrow! That's all! If you see me to-morrow you'll have to be a-takin' a trip down to Arkansaw."

With that he made a wild dash for the door, but the alert Kid locked it just in time and deposited the key in his pocket.

"Now, then," cried Donovan, "you might kill us both and get out of here, but you'll hang for it. What's more, you ain't got a chance to get a block away from here at any price. We've got a squad of police outside. Now sit down and listen to reason."

Then followed hours of persuasion from every possible angle. Glowing descriptions of the girl at home, of the cozy house he could build her with the money he would win by submitting to a few minutes of slight discomfort. They guarded him through a sleepless night and every second of the next day up to the hour set for the fight.

That the fight would be branded a fake and that the law would order an investigation, Donovan had no doubt now. But it was too late to step out. The thing had to be carried through. So Donovan bought a ticket to South America and waited with quaking heart for the fatal hour.

As tight as humanity could be packed the great crowd sat around the ringside in breathless suspense. It was one of the biggest throngs that ever had gathered to witness a prize fight. At last they were to get a glimpse of the famous Man of Mystery, the Arkansas Mountain Lion, the Peerless Wonder of Wonders, whose face had been hidden from them all this time!

But as the time passed without his appearance the crowd voiced its impatience in thunderous roars that grew louder each succeeding minute.

Meanwhile Donovan, with the tears rolling down his cheeks, was pleading with his hero in the dressing-room to muster up sufficient courage to walk to the ring.

"For Gawd's sake buck up!" he entreated. "We can't carry you out on a stretcher. Give 'em a chance to see you on your feet at least."

The Lion's only answer was a dazed stare as he sat there, trembling from head to foot like a man with the ague.

Finally the bedlam outside became so intense that Donovan feared to delay another second. At his orders two attendants seized the Lion by either arm and dragged him forth.

Thus with two men half dragging, half carrying him along, the crowd got its first look at the mighty Mountain Lion. That mysterious visage, unveiled at last, bore the expression of a sick man walking in a trance.

As one man the crowd gasped in dismay. Then came a tornado of jeers, hoots and catcalls.

"No wonder he hid his face," shrieked a would-be wit. "I would, too, with a map like that."

"Look out for the Lion, he'll run out!" cried another.

"Get a stretcher!"

"Call the police! He'll kill the champion!"

But the object of their taunts heard them not. Vaguely he was aware of some sort of rumbling, but he did not bother to ascertain the nature of it.

When they got him to his corner he sank down on his chair a dead weight. Everything before him was a blank haze.

Suddenly a shout that could be heard for blocks broke forth as the champion, fit, confident and smiling, stepped into the ring. But the dazed Lion neither saw nor heard.

The champion, glowing in the midst of all this mighty and unbounded adoration, was so busily occupied in greeting and surveying the crowd of worshippers that he forgot to cast more than a fleeting glance at his victim until the referee called the two men to the centre of the ring for instructions.

Somehow the Lion staggered his half of the distance, and for the first time stood face to face with the champion. And then, strangely, as the Lion lifted his head in one last effort at a semblance of fortitude, those at the ringside noticed a sudden change come over the champion's face.

His smile vanished, his eyes widened with a startled, uncertain look. The Lion's vision, however, was too blurred to observe this. He continued to gaze blankly as the referee talked until gradually, out of the haze, a white line loomed up on the champion's right cheek; the jagged white scar left by an old wound.

No sooner had the Lion found this than the haze began to lift. He studied the

champion feature by feature, and as he did so the ashen hue of his face was gradually supplanted by a crimson flush.

His legs straightened, his chest filled out and the mighty muscles in his shoulders and back sprang into prominence. For a full minute he continued to gaze. Then he laughed—a light-hearted, scornful laugh.

Donovan, convinced that fear had at last crazed his man began to edge toward the nearest exit. The crowd leaned forward in silent amazement.

The laugh was followed by a voice that was far from trembling with fear.

"One Round Higgin!" it cried. "You One Round Higgin! Well, I'll be gum-swiggled if you hain't little ole Clarence Higginbothom! That there same little runt I used to lick every sweet day of my life when we went to school! You've got one of them there trade-marks of mine on your cheek right now.

"You know why I used to lick you, don't you, Clarence? 'Cause you was the school snitch, and told the teacher every derved time you had it on any of us. A little double-faced sneak, that's what you was.

"You know *me*, don't you, Clarence? Tobias Brewer, that's me. Call me the Arkansaw Mountain Lion, if you like it better, but I'm jest plain ole Tobias Brewer when it comes to fightin' my little ole friend Clarence. And you a-callin' yourself One Round Higgin and a-bluffin' the world. Say, that's rich!"

Here Tobias Brewer sent his feet out in a cross between a jig and a fox-trot and cackled in unrestrained glee.

"Now, tap that bell, golldern ye," he cried as he spat into his gloves. "What'll you have first, Clarence? A black eye or a busted jaw? I serve 'em any way you like."

The gong announced the opening round, and Tobias Brewer sprang forward like a boy out of school rushing forth to a frolic. The champion, however, advanced with measured tread, his knees queerly bent.

The dread of those early days, when Tobias Brewer was the fear of his life, was upon him. He saw the championship wreath consumed in the vision of a series of disastrous and uninvited encounters with that long-legged, raw-boned boy who made going to school a nightmare for him.

His former aggressive tactics, that always had brought him the victory, were forgotten in a rush of blood to the heart.

Heroically as he tried, he could not shake off that dread nor disguise its hold upon him.

The cold sweat beads stood out on his forehead. It was One Round Higgin's turn to drag himself forth to the slaughter.

"And they call you a champion," cried Tobias Brewer. "Little Clarence Higginbothom a champion! You poor lantern-jawed runt! You squint-eyed baby! You butter-fingered, double-faced mama's boy! You—you—you—"

Before the champion could assimilate his faculties against this tirade Tobias Brewer sent his head rocking backward with a terrific blow to the face.

"Since you hain't a-seemin' to have no choice, I though I'd start in on your eye, Clarence," cackled Tobias.

The champion rubbed his glove across his eye. It was swollen shut. He directed a left hook at the grinning face before him and missed by a foot. In return the champion's jaw stopped Tobias Brewer's glove with appalling suddenness and he felt his knees sag.

The crowd went wild. There were no more jeers for Tobias Brewer. The Man of Mystery could fight after all. His pitiful entry was then only a part of the game; the fitting climax of a skilfully carried out campaign of surprises.

"Tear into him, Arkansaw boy!" they yelled. "You've got him going already."

"Go to it!"

"Give him a dose of his own medicine!"

The words sank like a knife into the champion's heart. The fickle public, whose esteem he believed, in his arrogance, he had anchored to himself, had deserted him already. That adoration which was his life had turned to derision. He was a broken idol before them.

With a shudder he threw himself at his enemy in one last wild effort born of despair, injured pride, hatred, shame—he knew not what. He would show them he still was champion! He would kill this grinning giant before their very eyes. But in his madness he cast science to the winds.

"Clarence is gettin' on his ear. I'll swan if he ain't flew clear off the handle," taunted Tobias, and side-stepped the champion's blind rushes with really astonishing skill, considering his lack of ring training.

But he was not running from the champion. He was merely playing with him. Time and again Tobias landed heavily on

face and body, and with each successful punch the champion's rushes became more feeble and blind. Tobias got his share of blows, but they were weak and harmless.

The excitement of the crowd knew no bounds. Donovan had given up all thought of flight. He was at the ringside now, shouting, laughing, crying; calling Tobias his jewel, his eighth wonder of the world, his champion of champions!

"You'll win, boy! You'll win!" he screeched. "I always knew you'd win. He can't last much longer. Tear into him, boy! He's all in!"

Tobias turned his grin on Donovan.

"Get that there money ready," he called across. "I'm a-goin' to put Clarence to bed now."

There followed two hammer-like blows, and Clarence Higginbotham, better known as the peerless One-Round Higgin, sank to the floor for the full count and a little more.

It was all over in one round. The frenzied crowd proclaimed a new champion. From the press-box the news was flashed across the continent.

Tobias Brewer of Nameless Creek, Ark., had become a national celebrity! And that night Tobias Brewer left his bed untouched as he sat at a table counting and recounting an enormous roll of greenbacks.

It was still very early the next morning when the jubilant Donovan rushed along the street toward the new champion's lodging-house. His mission was an important one. He intended to drill his "phenom" in the art of being interviewed before the sport and special writers of the various newspapers could besiege him.

He bounded up the steps just in time to meet the great man coming out of the front

door. At the sight of him Donovan stopped short and stared with open mouth.

The man who stood before him was the same Tobias Brewer he had met that day in the West Side Athletic Club, leather boots, faded overalls, pink tie and all. In his hand he carried a small gray canvas telescope satchel, fastened with two bright yellow cloth straps.

"What the devil!" cried Donovan. "You ain't going away?"

"Sure thing," replied Tobias with calm finality. "It's back to Arkansaw for me."

Donovan gulped and passed his hand over his eyes.

"Why, boy, you're crazy. Don't you know you're champion of the world? I've got vaudeville and burlesque contracts enough for you to keep you busy for the next two years at \$500 a week. Whoever heard of a champion dropping off the face of the earth the next day?"

"That's all right," answered Tobias. "Call me champion if it makes you feel good, but I never did nothin' but lay out that there Clarence Higginbotham, a thing I'd done a dozen times before. But if you ever hitched me up with one of them there real fighters, and that'd likely be the next time, I'd be a goner, that's all."

"I've got money enough to last me a lifetime, and I hain't a-calculatin' on bein' sent home in a box after a row with one of these here scientific boxers. Right now the goin's good and I'm a-goin' back home to build that there cozy house for that there gal of mine. So long, brother."

Donovan wilted to a sitting posture on the steps and through eyes that saw as if through a fog, watched the pastoral figure of Tobias Brewer disappear all too rapidly around the corner.

PROTEST

THE ghost-flower, not the rose, should be the pledge

Of love like thine, so bloodless and so cold—

Exactly chilled to type, the perfect mold

Of flawless forms, whereof none may allege

A fault; a pallid goodness to disedge

The human heart—love wholly self-controlled!

Oh, for frank passion innocently bold—

The honest girl I kissed beside the hedge

When glowed the gloaming giddy with glad song,

The lane a dizzy whirl of dancing flowers,

And all my blood beat joy of June-time's charm!

You love but me? Why, then, your old self wrong

By new conventions? Oh, for bygone hours,

The rustic maid whose brown hand was so warm!

Stokely S. Fisher.

Fools of Sacrifice



by Richard Duffy

A THREE-PART STORY—PART ONE

CHAPTER I.

THE CASTAWAY.

THE heat of the sun on Big Twin Island in the Caribbean had hatched out a nest of turtle eggs from their covering in the sand. Following their primal instinct, the new-born turtles scampered toward the water, there to begin their struggle for existence.

They had not gone far before they found they had to climb over an obstruction that moved under them strangely.

It was the naked breast of a man. Half-buried in the winding-sheet of the beach he lay, more as if in death than in life.

The oozy crawl of their bellies against his flesh and the gritty feel of their sandy claws roused him to the consciousness that he was faint, sun-scalded and being devoured by a horde of huge insects. Above all and worst of all was the realization that he was alive—not dead as he had wished when he felt the last pulse of sense leave him that night.

That night! His frayed mind tried to gather the threads of recollection that he might assure himself when that night was. Was it a week, a month, or years ago?

The effort was futile. He could think of nothing, see nothing but the huge insects creeping over him. They made him quiver with a feeling of nausea.

By a shuddering effort he dragged himself to a sitting posture. Then he attempted to raise his arms and thrust these monstrous creatures away from him.

They did not seem so big now, even in his glazed and feverish sight. They spread here and there, though still driving toward the water's edge, before the sudden rearing-up of his massive trunk and shoulders.

All against his will the man's arms dropped into his lap like logs of wood. Weather-beaten and sun-blistered, he ached in every joint with a pain that made his head reel.

His chin fell against his chest and he let his eyelids close for a moment, seeking relief from the daze.

His helplessness affrighted him. He made an effort to cry out—not that he had any hope of being heard in this desert corner of the world, but rather to convince himself that he had some control of his faculties, that he was not doomed to be a prisoner here on the broiling sands with that implacable stare of the blue sea before him until he went mad.

The stifled shriek of his voice sounded with a kind of demoniac mockery in his ears.

"It's not my voice! It's not mine!" he told himself inwardly as if to allay the horrible panic of loneliness and desolation that seemed to burden the air all about him.

Abruptly he fell backward. He struggled as fiercely as he might in his enfeebled condition against lying down again lest he should not be able to rise.

Death he did not fear. He had even craved it when it appeared as if seeking him, but he did not want to be slowly

tortured and teased by it in this dire spot. In his frantic endeavors he managed so to twist his body that although he sank back on the sand he lay on his side with his head pillowed on his arm.

This change of position afforded him momentary ease. Meanwhile the entire brood of turtles, except one, had found their way to the water.

This one had been thrown on its back by the man when he sat up. It lay within two feet of him, its legs scrambling the air with incessant waste of energy. So it would fight until it wore itself out—and it would die fighting, the man thought as he watched it for more than ten minutes.

"Die fighting!"

The words began to ring in his ears almost as if they were being whispered to him by some unseen person.

The longer he studied the turtle the more absorbed he became in its desperate struggles. Presently to his amazement he was muttering words of encouragement to the creature as if it were a human being.

A new-born turtle—a man of twenty-four, hovering on the border of death or madness—and behold the simple miracle of life renewing itself!

"You've fought long and hard enough, kid," he said, addressing the turtle the while he dragged himself toward it and with heavy aching hand managed to turn the creature over on its feet.

Instantly the turtle scampered down the beach and slipped out on the surface of the water that rolled athwart the sands in little waves, white and delicate as lace at the crest.

"Die fighting!" the man muttered grimly as he weakly but determinedly worked his body round until with a new glow in his heart he got himself up on his hands and knees and started to creep inland.

The white, shining cliff looked to his fevered eyes to be miles high. But the fringe of low trees that ran along the edge of it was so cool and green in the morning breeze!

He gazed upon it with yearning gladness and new hope. If before he had been looking into the mouth of Avernus, now he felt as if he were having a glimpse of the walls of Eden. Within their shade he would find shelter from the glare of the sea and from the scalding heat of the sun.

Slowly, doggedly he crept along, groaning in pain, yet gradually advancing to-

ward the side of the cliff that fell away several feet as it approached the lagoon dividing the Twin Islands. Every so often he would lift his head wearily to take account of his bearings and judge what progress he had made.

He had perhaps not more than two hundred yards to go, yet each successive foot of dragging, heavy sand that he covered left him weaker.

Once his knees and hands caved under him. Moaning and cursing, he dug his toes and fingers into the sand, until through sheer force of desperation he managed to recover his creeping position. He gritted his teeth with a feeling of triumph. Breathless, he lifted his head to glance again wistfully at the lower side of the cliff, the while he rested momentarily.

On the instant the piercing cry of a human voice tore the silence of the shore. A flock of birds shot up in alarm from their covert in the trees. The sudden shriek jarred the castaway's half-delirious brain so that he wondered if what he saw were real or only imaginary.

But the cry was real, he told himself. The birds were real. Real also must be the figure of a youth he saw standing on the cliff at the very spot he had fixed as the goal of his grueling clamber across the sand.

The figure on the cliff was a negro, slender of form, who seemed hardly more than a boy in years. His legs and feet were bare below ragged trousers. His arms, too, were bare, and thrust through the arm-holes of his shirt of vivid green.

He held them upward as if in terror before the spectacle of this creeping wreck of humanity. Seen thus in the sunlight they glistened like black marble.

"Come here! Come here!" the castaway called in a voice hardly above a whisper.

At the same time, by dint of wrenching his whole body, he raised one hand in order to beckon to the negro. Then he toppled over on his back and lay panting faintly with closed eyes.

Soon the panting ceased. The castaway lay still as death, heedless of the sun that blazed down on him pitilessly.

The negro on the cliff clasped his hands against his breast when he saw the castaway fall, and turned, what between bewilderment and awe, as if to flee from the sight. In fact, he did take a few steps, yet always glancing backward.

Abruptly he stopped, turned full around

and faced the prostrate body, which seemed to have a fascination for his dark, glittering eyes. Black as was the youth's skin, in his features were a refinement and delicacy of line that gave his face a look of beauty almost too fine for a man.

"You, mister, down there!" he said in tones most musical, though quavering with fear, as he pointed with his long, slim hand toward the castaway. "I bet you jess like all de res' o' dem. Think Jolly George don' know what trouble's a brewin' and a stewin' down yonder by the big house end o' dis island.

"I bet you one o' dem what the great boss, Cap'n Neville, he knock silly some day if they goes a pesterin' of him and Miss Susan. I ain't no fear-man, don't you think.

"I'm a goin' right up and make you say it, an' den I'll tell Mother Juliet an' she'll put a lucky charm on me for me a tellin' her."

While he spoke he made his way haltingly down the shore and along. When he came near the castaway his pace became more laggard. He zigzagged to this side and that, like a dog that sniffs danger on each breath of air. He braced his shoulders and began to whistle a queer, mournful melody.

Nearer and nearer he came, always shying from side to side, yet always with fixed, glittering eyes on the inert form of the castaway. Now Jolly George was within six feet of him. Pausing with a tremor in his limbs, the youth sang to the tune of his whistled music:

"Jolly George is a fine good boy;
No harm he do to no man;
And when he grows up in a long, long time—
He will sail far away
To the Bay of Biscay
For to become a showman!"

Childish as were the words, they had a magic significance for Jolly George. He sang them always to announce his coming, but especially he sang them in moments of timidity or doubt, when he was alone in the dark and when the wind blew high and suddenly before the breaking of a big storm. He was convinced if he sang them on such occasions no ill would befall him.

Little enough he knew of the Bay of Biscay, or of what a showman was or might he doing in that distant body of water. On this account the song had a charm even more mysterious for him. He had made it

up some years before out of words picked here and there in the first story-book he learned to read.

Those who knew Jolly George, if they ever gave the matter a thought, might discover real pathos in the line:

And when he grows up in a long, long time.

Growing up he was, graceful and well-formed in body; yet his mind remained simple and wondering as that of a child of nine or ten. His soul and throat full of music various and inexhaustible as that of the birds of the air, he sang and roamed the island as free as they.

But there was a break in his voice as he got near enough to the body on the beach to see the man's features plainly. He walked cautiously round the prostrate figure twice, looking down with blinking eyes, curious yet fearful.

The song died away into a faint murmur, and Jolly George gradually began to talk aloud to himself, which was his way of ordering his thoughts.

"You're a white man and your hair is yellow like the flames of the fire in the big house. You're big and strong, too. But you didn't never come from anywhere on this island.

"You hear me? I tell you you're a strange, lost man. I bet you fell out of your ship somewheres, that's what I bet. Didn't you, now? But you can't say, 'cos you're dead—real dead."

For all that the boy stood at the man's naked feet, studying the castaway's whole length as if doubting his own assertion.

"Yes. You are dead," he declared finally. "And I ain't a goin' to say nothin' about you to nobody. Jolly George knows how to keep out of trouble, I bet. And there's trouble enough up by the big house. You hear?"

He leaned over the castaway angrily.

"I never see you. Somebody else got to find you. I know too much."

How it happened Jolly George was too greatly terrified to stop to consider. Yet just as he was turning away hastily the boy's bare foot grazed the foot of the castaway. With a cry of affright he swung round and made a savage lunge to kick the man. But he dared not touch the body.

"Now you see what you done, you dead man!" he cried. "You touched me! I say you touched me, and I'll die, too, you ugly villain dead man."

Fleet as a deer, Jolly George ran from the spot of contamination. Up the beach to the low end of the cliff he went and leaped to the shining white wall.

Sweat started at every pore. Beating his breast as he ran, he moaned repeatedly:

"Lord! Lord! An' I'll be dead, too!"

CHAPTER II.

ANOTHER JULIET.

FROM the inland side of the cliff Jolly George could view a goodly reach of Big Twin Island, well wooded along the edges with luxuriant palms that formed a frame for an assortment of tree-tufted little hills sloping here and there into rolling meadow.

Just beyond the last rise of land he knew was the Settlement of the servants and laborers of the big house. Far away on the western point was the big house itself. Between these sections, he knew, had lately been brewing rancor and mischief and secret doings too complex for his simple mind to understand.

Until to-day this mystery had gnawed at his brain ceaselessly; but now he could think only of the uncanny touch of the dead man's naked foot against his own. The faster he ran the faster it seemed to him the chill of death spread through his every nerve.

In about ten minutes he arrived gasping before a small one-story building of cement, that was a hut rather than a house. Dense tree and shrub-growth smothered it in on all sides. The crooked path that led to the low, wide door was so thickly spread with vines and sprouting grass that one could easily guess it was not in frequent use.

Frantically Jolly George hammered the door with his palms, calling shrilly:

"Mother Juliet! Mother Juliet! Save me! I'm gone to death!"

Slowly the wide door was swung open, revealing a gloom within the hut black as night. The shadow of foliage in which Mother Juliet's abode nestled was almost like broad daylight compared to the darkness inside the door.

Jolly George gazed with expectant and impatient eyes until the door should be wide open. A dim streak of light began to appear. It was down near the ground, waving from side to side as it advanced toward him.

As the streak of light reached the threshold it suddenly rose higher, and then the light faded as a phosphorescent gleam before the day.

At sight of a huge snake of brilliant color the boy stopped, riveted where he stood. The rhythmic swaying of the reptile's toad-like head staggered his senses. He felt that the circle of the snake's swing was growing wider and wider, coming nearer and nearer to him.

He tried to raise his arms—to appeal for mercy to Mother Juliet. But his tongue gagged his throat; and his hands, as he vainly strove to lift them, clutched at his belt in an uncontrollable paroxysm.

A heavy, sullen, sleepy voice broke upon his ears from the darkness of the hut, asking:

"Who are you, skulker, that comes stealing in on Mother Juliet? You wish for me to wrap this snake round you and round to suck your heart's blood out? Pigeon's blood is good for my work and so is rat's blood, but best of all is—"

"No, no, no!" the boy broke in hysterically, and added, sobbing: "Jolly George is death-touched already. You got to charm me, Mother Juliet, an' I'll catch pigeons and rats for you all you like. Only make haste, 'cos I'm gone."

The boy sank to the ground and writhed in misery there, the while in floods of tears he moaned the same words over and over again.

He did not see the snake vanish abruptly within the hut as if snatched by an invisible hand. Nor was he conscious of the fact that Mother Juliet was pottering about in there, fingering bottles and jars as she crooned a steady, solemn flow of words that only a voodoo seeress like herself could presume to interpret.

Still crooning, she appeared in the doorway, a squat, stoutish negress, of an age somewhere under fifty. Her dress was all of yellow satin, faded and soiled, which hung about her in baggy folds.

On her head was a silk turban, of scarlet and black, ornamented with mock brilliants set in brass and silver. From her ears depended two enormous rings of a coppery hue that flashed as she shook her head and blinked at the light of day with large owl-like eyes.

When at length she made out the figure of Jolly George, shuddering in the undergrowth a few yards off, her thick lips spread

wide in a grisly smile, showing flawless rows of big white teeth.

She knelt down, turned the boy over on his back and began to stroke his face and throat, always droning her mystic croon. Soon the quivering of his body ceased and with shut eyes he lay in trance-like quiet.

"Son," she asked in her heavy singsong tone, "who has been putting evil on you?"

Thrice she repeated the question before Jolly George opened his eyes and replied hoarsely:

"It's the death-touch!" He caught at her yellow sleeve tremulously.

"Who gave it to you, son?"

"The villain dead man on the beach."

"Where?"

"Here on my right foot." The boy sat up and pointed to the inner side of his foot. "It burns sometimes and sometimes it's cold—ugh!"

He clutched Mother Juliet's hand, pleading:

"Charm it away! Charm it away quick!"

The woman pulled her hands free and reaching into a pocket at the side of her skirt as she stood up, produced a round china box, almost transparently white. The box bore no mark. It was half an inch in height perhaps and about two inches in diameter.

"Right now you put this charm in your pocket, son, and never dare to open it or the charm will go away as soon as air touches it," she adjured the boy in a solemn tone.

"No light must see it and you must never look at it. It's my own charm and I would not leave it go from me except I mean to take the death-touch from you before it's too late."

Eying the seeress with devotional awe, Jolly George immediately put the little box in his trousers' pocket, responding:

"I bet I do what you say, Mother Juliet, and never nothing different."

"Now wait here till I come," the woman ordered as she turned away to re-enter her hut.

Jolly George would have sung the little song about himself to cheer his soul, but he could not. He only whistled the air plaintively while he watched Mother Juliet's door to see what new kind of terror or of solace she was preparing for him.

She came forth, brisk of step, carrying a great sun-umbrella, which she did not attempt to open until she and Jolly George

were outside the thick growth of trees that was her sanctuary.

First she pointed with it to a square pedestal of coral polished like marble, that was almost hidden in the ferns and grass near the spot where the path to her hut began. From a copper bracket fastened to the pedestal with a band of the same metal hung a small ship's bell.

"You see that bell," Mother Juliet said sternly, "and you knew it was there."

"Yes; I knew it was there, I bet," the boy stammered.

"Don't you never come for me again unless you ring that bell and stay waiting here, and don't forget. If I am out and away looking about my work, why you jess leave something on the stone I can tell is from you. Then you visit me again after a while, Son George."

"There's two dead pigeons on the stone now," the boy remarked, as if willing to divert the talk from himself.

"Have I not eyes as well as you and that can see things you shall never see?" the woman inquired sarcastically.

"You have, I bet," the boy replied timorously. "I only jess happened to notice the pigeons."

With a slow crooning song, rising and falling in monotonous turn, the seeress gave her sun-umbrella to Jolly George and bade him keep his back toward her. This he did only too gladly.

"You little birds is cold dead," Mother Juliet mumbled under her breath as she stopped her crooning when she had thoroughly examined them. "Your legs is cut off and that tells me who will be here to-night. You jess lay here like this, bill to bill, an' I'll make quick haste to return and warm your tiny hearts."

Replacing the dead pigeons on the pedestal, Mother Juliet turned sharply toward Jolly George, saying:

"You see, son, how I must always be studying and working. Open my umbrella and hurry away with me now."

Trembling, the boy opened it, showing the inside a brilliant green, the outside an equally brilliant yellow.

"Now you jess take and show me that dead man on the beach," said Mother Juliet.

"No, no! I can't! I can't durst go near him again!"

Mother Juliet tugged at the boy's arm and started him.

"Come!" she ordered bruskiy. "You jess show the way as fast as you can. Think with all this trouble between the big house and the Settlement and you ahangin' in one place or the other, singing songs and overlistening to things you ain't no right to hear that I don't realize you for a foolish, dangerous person?"

"I bet I'm no such thing," muttered Jolly George, who grasped only a vague idea of the meaning of Mother Juliet's tirade.

"And it's sure dangerous to be fooling, son," Mother Juliet mumbled, unheeding, as they went along, "but it's more dangerous to be dangerous in these days. Woful things are hanging above the island.

"I can tell by the way the stars jump in and out of the sky at night, by the way the sun comes up skulking over the water in the morning, by the way the fire leaps on my hearth, and the way the pigeons' flesh smells queer when it burns, and the way them conjure snakes of mine hiss flames from their mouths all the time folks here is asleep and think nothin' is happenin' at all. Huh!"

She grunted a dismal break of a laugh.

"I know! I know!"

By now they had come to the lower end of the cliff, where there was a stiff climb over a jagged coral rock of about six feet in height.

"Fold the umbrella," Mother Juliet commanded, "and throw it up above. Then, you, son, lend me a hand strong so's I get up without breaking of my old bones."

In a second Jolly George folded the big orange and green umbrella and flung it dexterously to the shelf of the cliff.

CHAPTER III.

A THIEVISH SAMARITAN.

MOTHER JULIET'S motive in the present excursion was deeper than normal curiosity in so rare and grim a find on one of the beaches of Big Twin Island as the washed-in body of a man. The currents of the sea hereabouts and the scavengers of it usually obviated such discoveries. Unless a man were wrecked near the island, in her memory, he scarcely could be flung upon its shore.

In this particular instance her curiosity was at fever heat.

Had she not been constantly sought by the leaders of the Settlement for advice in

their scheme against the members and adherents of the big house on Half-moon Bay at the westerly point?

Did she not know of the insurgents' plan to fetch from far Honduras a small boat-load of rifles and ammunition because all arms had been denied them or taken away by the tyrant Captain Neville and his minions of the big house?

To attempt to approach the island in a boat of a size suitable to the vast and shifty track of water to be sailed would have been suicidal folly, it had been decided.

To make the course in a small boat was doubly perilous in the journey, and not especially easy. On all sides the sea was scanned nightly with a search-light from the Half-moon Bay section, the highest point of land, ever since suspicion had awakened there.

A landing would necessarily be made on a misty night, and it might be at the easterly end, amid the hidden reefs that flung themselves out to sea like parts of a great web from their beginnings in the lagoon between Big Twin Island and Little.

The night before had been cloudy. The arrival of the boat from Honduras was due, even overdue, according to Mother Juliet's information.

The four men who had manned the boat she was acquainted with; and although Jolly George had assured her that he was positive the dead man hailed neither from the Settlement nor the big house she was far from accepting his assurance as final.

In the first place the boy was scared out of the little wits he had, she argued to herself, because he had touched the body. Also, it was not at all beyond possibility that the men of the boat, for reasons of their own, had persuaded a sympathizer from the mainland to join.

If then mischance had befallen the craft, Mother Juliet should have first clue to the mystery surrounding its nonappearance and thereby gain additional credit for her powers of divination.

Such thoughts as these she had been pondering ever since she was convinced that Jolly George was not lying to her about the body on the beach. They flashed across her mind in an instantaneous and complete picture now that with a quick jerk of his arm he helped her mount to the top of the cliff.

The pink scallop of beach was spread in front of them and the insidiously smooth

waters of the lagoon. Beyond, toward the east, smirking waves sidled up on the sands whether they lapped the living or the dead.

"Where's your dead man?" growled Mother Juliet as she marked with a waving gesture of her umbrella the vacant beach.

Jolly George wrung his hands and glanced here, there and everywhere in amazement and alarm.

"Yah!" he screamed suddenly and thrust both his hands from him in the direction of a clump of bushes that sprang from a crevice at the foot of the cliff.

A bare hand stuck up in the air. On the fingers, Mother Juliet was quick to notice, were the gleam and sparkle of rings, a sight dear to her heart.

"Yah, you fool!" she cried to the boy. "He will not be dead. I told you, you are dangerous."

Running down to the man she hooked her fat hands under his armpits and with a force astonishing in one of her years and build dragged the six feet of emaciated, unconscious humanity up to the lowest level of the cliff.

Turning him over on his back, she listened to his heart and felt the castaway's pulse deftly, knowingly, without aid of charm or incantation.

Jolly George came up hesitantly and at a safe distance observed her doings with mingled awe and inquisitiveness.

Without lifting her eyes from the man Mother Juliet seemed to sense the boy's presence. She called out loudly:

"Your dead man is alive and I am going to make him strong again, you fool and dangerous person!"

The boy retreated a step or two at the odious term, yet watched her as a very worker of miracles.

Mother Juliet took a small glass flask from her capacious pocket. It was filled with a liquid white as water.

Uncorking it, she drank from the neck of the bottle three times, tossing her black and scarlet turban backward as she did so. The brilliants and metal ornaments on it flashed in the sunlight. Then Jolly George, open-mouthed, saw her pour some of the liquid into the palm of her hand.

Having laid the bottle beside her on the ground, she rubbed both her palms briskly together and held one after the other flat against the castaway's mouth and nostrils. For a long time, it seemed to Jolly George, she continued to repeat this operation.

A fact beyond belief it was to him when he saw with his own eyes that the "dead" man raised both his arms and made an effort as if seeking support from Mother Juliet.

His slow mind was confusedly turning over this wonder, only to be jarred by a stern summons and motion of the hand that he come to her side.

Shifting this way and that, the boy approached suspiciously. Once he was within reach Mother Juliet caught his hand and dragged him close.

"Son," she hissed, "if you ever dare tell a soul or speak to any one about what you see me do here or about this dead man—then remember the blood-spell will get you at the heart and go all over you. Remember!"

"I swear 'fore Heaven, Mother Juliet!" Jolly George responded.

"No word more, then. Jess catch a good holt on his legs by the knees and lift when I lift his shoulders."

Jolly George bent down and took hold of the man's legs as he had been instructed. Mother Juliet seized the castaway under the armpits and thus they bore the half-dead man to her hut.

Alone they had covered this distance in fifteen minutes. With their limp burden of dead weight they were obliged to pause every so often to rest. It must have taken them half an hour to reach the grove of the seeress, though she toiled and made Jolly George toil hard.

When they rested for the last time within close sight of their destination they were both dripping with perspiration and panting with animal-like groans.

"Son, hark to me!" Mother Juliet said between breaths as she stepped across the form of the castaway and laid her hand on the boy's shoulder.

"I hark everything, I bet," Jolly George answered, mopping his brow.

Mother Juliet's thick lips were laid close to the boy's delicately rounded ear.

"A good and brave son you are. You've done right and worked hard. And you're afraid of me, ain't you?"

Quite unexpectedly she gripped his arm. Jolly George's eyes rolled till only the whites showed. Never had she been so mighty and so fearsome.

Never had she been so near to him. Nor could he move a jot from her.

She laid her fat fingers against his mouth

in token of sealing it and with a leer of half-humorous menace whispered:

"You remember your promise?"

Not daring to speak even now, the boy nodded his agreement to the covenant between them.

"You want to help me some more?" she went on, still pressing her fingers against his mouth.

Again he nodded. To him it was as if those fingers were burning a brand upon him.

"You surely do?" the seeress asked in the same frightening whisper.

Once more the boy nodded, almost faint with fear.

She took her hand from his mouth to hear him declare solemnly:

"I swear, I bet, I always keep my promise to you."

"So you ain't any more foolish," she rejoined and patted his head as if she were talking to a child of seven. "Run fast as you can now, Son George, and fetch back my umbrella from the cliff. Bring it to the hut, and don't forget to ring the ship's bell and stand by it till you see me."

For a moment or two the seeress eyed the boy's fleeing figure. Then unaided she took the castaway under his arms again and dragged him close to the little wood in which her hut was hidden.

Instead, however, of entering by the path at the entrance of which the ship's bell hung, she followed a concealed opening on the seaward side that was known only to herself.

Thick undergrowth, rank with moisture and clammy with threads of spider-webs, contrived to make this zigzag access to her hut impossible to a person other than Mother Juliet. Even she at times was obliged to get down on her knees and drag her quarry painfully along foot by foot.

At last she reached a small shed of timber that lay plumb against the rear wall of the low cement structure that was now her shrine and her home. Originally the timber-shed was her humble roof-tree, but with increasing influence over the more devoted natives of the Settlement she had succeeded in having built for her the more commodious and comfortable building.

A doorway in the wall connected the two, because in consultation with her clients she frequently found it necessary to retire to meditate upon their problems.

Actually in the timber-shed were only two

or three discarded camp-stools, a worn mattress, old clothes of shabby gaudiness and a fireplace long in disuse. Two windows were built on either side of the door, but they admitted no light, because they were shrouded with ferns on the outside, while inside they were thick with smoke and grime.

Yet with the eyes of a cat Mother Juliet picked her way to the mattress, on which she laid the sun-scalded, jaded body of the man from the beach.

His chest heaved. A long, slow, gasping breath issued from his open, blistered mouth. He had no longer the strength even to moan in his agony.

Mother Juliet was all movement and action. From her flask she poured more of the white liquid into her hand, and, having rubbed both palms together again, allowed him to inhale the pungent gin-vapor.

The man moved his head restlessly, as one in a baleful dream.

Quickly the seeress went into her living-room—which was, in fact, the whole house—and returned with water, milk and a large jar of coconut-oil. Another journey into her own abode and she brought back a lighted lantern and an armful of soft flannel cloths of all varieties of vivid color and cleanliness.

Raising the man's head on one hand, with the other she let cooling water flow slowly into his mouth from the neck of a gourd. The man choked—sputtered—squirmed. Mother Juliet noted his feeble energy with a glad glistening of her owl-like eyes.

"Son, you'll keep some of that, I know," she mumbled proudly as she laid the helpless, well-shaped auburn head on a faded, soiled pillow.

Mother Juliet was keenly conscious of the little time she had at her disposal before the return of Jolly George from the cliff. With an adroit though jerky wrenching of her arms she tore off the man's rotted shirt and drenched his arms and trunk with coconut-oil. On his face and neck she applied the same soothing unguent and lastly on his feet and legs, which were blistered raw to the knees.

All this time the seeress had been crouched, swerving here and there with a movement of a huge, unwieldy sea-lion in dingy yellow satin. She placed the jar of oil on the floor beside her and stretched out her arm to reach the small tin-pail which

contained some of the milk she always kept half a-boil at her fireplace.

Into the pail she poured the remaining contents of the flask of white liquid and stirred the two ingredients with the neck of the bottle. The latter, with its cork duly inserted, she put back carefully into her pocket.

Gagging at the throat and shivering all over, the unconscious castaway took the small quantity of this aliment that Mother Juliet poured into his mouth. She watched him swallow it convulsively and waited patiently a few moments.

Then she administered a second tablespoonful. This, her sharp eyes noted with encouragement, went down with less difficulty.

Placing the tin pail of milk on the floor, she picked up the coconut-oil again. This time she used it only on his arms and hands.

As she gently applied it to his left hand she slipped from his little finger and the third finger four gold rings, each of which was studded with as many big diamonds.

In the glow of the lantern she studied the rings hungrily. She flashed the stones against the light. They sparkled like magic white fire.

She rubbed dirt from the floor on them and flashed them again against the lantern's flame. Still the wonderful gleam shone in specks which the dirt had not covered.

She bit into the gold bands, one after the other, with all the strength of her sound teeth. When she saw the marks she had made on each one of them in the yielding metal she grinned over their grouped brilliance in her black palm with unholy glee. There could be no doubt of their genuineness.

With a glance over her shoulder at the man on the mattress lying still, eyes shut and breathing heavily, Mother Juliet sprang up and went forth to encounter Jolly George, who was striking the ship's gong outside.

She paused for a moment before her dimly blazing hearth, in the shadows of which were a number of sleeping coiled things, on whose varicolored skins the flames shone weirdly.

The seeress unclasped a heavy brass chain that hung about her neck inside her bodice. A dozen strange ornaments of odd metals were strung upon the chain, on

which also she threaded, with a caressing glance, the four diamond rings of the cast-away.

CHAPTER IV.

BLACK HENRY'S MESSAGE.

OF spirit elate, a saturnine smile on her pudgy face, and cuddling with one hand the four diamond rings against the oily skin of her breast through its covering of yellow satin, Mother Juliet waddled along the crooked path of the grove toward the pedestal.

Here Jolly George stood waiting with her sun-umbrella. He held it out folded as she approached, with a look and poise that meant he would take to his heels as soon as he had delivered it.

Anticipating his move, she gave no notice to the umbrella, but seized his free hand and drew him close to her away from the pedestal into a covert of long grass and shrubs. The boy could not but gaze into her sleepy eyes that searched his commandingly.

"You can go on along now, son," she told him. "But first you listen to me. Great things are a comin' to you for what you've done to-day in finding that man. But you got to do what I say. Remember the white box there in your pocket. Feel it burn when I talk?"

The seeress thrust the boy's hand back into his pocket.

"Feel it burn—burn—burn!" she repeated, crooning.

"Yes—it burns—it burns!" the boy asserted in a trembling whisper.

"And I can make it burn worse; you know that," the woman insinuated with a grisly smile of menace.

Jolly George nodded, and his knees shook under him.

She patted his cheek reassuringly as she went on:

"When we get through with this work we have to do quickly and carefully—nobody knowing about it at the Settlement or up at the big house, mind—then I'll make you really my son, Jolly George, and we'll have bags full of gold, you and I.

"We'll sail far away from this lonely island to a great, lovely city, where we'll dress gorgeous, eat gorgeous, do everything we want to do and nothing we don't want to. You won't be poor, foolish Jolly George

any more, but George, son of Mother Juliet, a fine, rich young man, and you'll marry a lady."

"But I ain't your son, am I?" the boy queried, bewildered by the dazzling picture of the future Mother Juliet drew. "My mother died here when I was a baby, they all says, and my father he sneaked on a steamer and run away."

"Oh, I'll fix all that," Mother Juliet responded. "You jess run as fast as you can to the Settlement and get hold of the overseer, William Ransom. Tell him to come here right away."

By way of farewell she pressed her fat fingers over the boy's mouth and mumbled some words that were all the more impressive because they were wholly beyond any ability of his to understand.

Her eyes were closed; her head, thrown back on her short neck, swayed from side to side, balancing the rhythm of the words she uttered.

Suddenly, on the light breeze, the boy's sharp ears caught a different, fainter sound. He ventured to turn his head a little to the left and glanced between the branches of the trees all about them toward the meadow and upland that faced Mother Juliet's grove.

Each second the sound grew more distinct.

"Mother Juliet! Quick! See! He's coming! Overseer Ransom!" suddenly he cried as he pulled her hand away from his mouth.

The seeress blinked her eyes and looked here and there as one aroused from sleep, before she ascertained whither the boy was pointing.

"Then you don't need to see him at all, son," said Mother Juliet. "Go on along like I told you."

Swift as a rabbit Jolly George darted into the undergrowth and vanished amid a rustling of fern-leaves.

The seeress, leaning on her umbrella, appeared on the path and walked out to the end of it, peering on all sides as if she were seeking some one.

A very giant of a man, moving with rapid, heavy strides, came up with her almost immediately. He wore a spick-and-span khaki suit. From polished puttees to speckless white sun-helmet there breathed about him an air of military trimness and order.

His close-growing, kinky hair was glossy

black with oil; his square, shaven face light chocolate in color and not unhandsome. Only in his narrow-framed, small, restless, reddish-brown eyes lurked an indefinable something that was discordant with his general make-up—a something part savagery, part shiftiness.

He stood at attention and saluted the seeress by touching his hand to the rim of his helmet, which he then took off and held at his side. Despite his powerful, jutting jaw, his round, close-cropped head was almost grotesquely small for his huge height and breadth of figure.

"I wanted you to come, William Ransom, before this evening," Mother Juliet began in singsong, "and so you came. See!"

She brushed aside the bushes with her umbrella.

William saw his offering of a pair of dead pigeons on the pedestal.

"I was afraid I could not come to-night," he observed in a high voice of marked English intonation.

"I knew—I knew you were coming," Mother Juliet said, watching him as if reading his soul with her sleepy eyes.

The man shook his head and braced his shoulders, startled by her uncanny powers. Yet he had no stomach to resist or question them.

"We must go into the house," she resumed soberly. "You fetch the pigeons."

Having come in quest of her counsel, the overseer picked up the birds readily. But his stride had lost its spring as he followed the seeress. He sensed portents of ill tidings in her manner, when he had until this moment been looking forward to good with the utmost confidence.

Mother Juliet bade him wait outside her closed door, which William did obediently, holding the pigeons in one hand and his helmet in the other. The door was locked merely with an oak bar or bolt on the inner side; but even if the seeress had left it open the man would not have had the audacity to steal a look within against her knowledge. Yet by his supporters of the Settlement he was rated the boldest, shrewdest man on the island.

Mother Juliet had passed into the timber shed at the back of her hut to make inspection of the castaway.

He lay as she had left him—flat on his back on the soiled mattress, breathing heavily in the sleep of utter exhaustion.

Hooking her lantern on her arm, she picked up the motley-colored cloths and rags that she had left at the foot of the bed and passed back softly into her room. These cloths she pinned over the connecting door in such a way as to screen any ray of light from penetrating to the timber shed.

On tiptoe she advanced to the door outside of which William Ransom stood. Noiselessly she raised the wooden bar and slowly pulled back the door, remaining in the shadow behind it.

The overseer knew the signal. With an abrupt gasp in his breathing he stepped inside. The door was closed as noiselessly as it had been opened.

The giant's height almost topped the lintel as he sank on his haunches and sat with crossed legs against the door. Mother Juliet took the pigeons from his extended hand. William, biting his thin lips, clutched his helmet against the pit of his stomach.

The open fire on the hearth was burning very low. On either side two black globes were suspended from iron arms; they were iron pots. One contained simmering milk, the other simmering water.

About the room the cot of the seeress, her walnut clothes-closet, clothes on hooks along the wall, shelves with dishes and cooking-utensils, a chair or two—all showed merely as blacker spots in the gloom of the place.

Yet Mother Juliet moved here and there lightly and with ease, crooning to herself in a voice so gentle and low that it seemed to be following her squat shape rather than issuing from her lips.

She dipped a bowl into the pot containing milk and broke some pieces of bread into it. This she gave to William, who waited until he saw her seated cross-legged before the fire, partaking of a similar dish, before he touched his own. His share he gulped in three or four swallows, then laid the bowl against the wall on the far side of the door.

Leisurely the seeress ate and drank. The coiled things clustered near the hearth began to unwind and veer toward her. When the bowl was empty she picked up the two pigeons that had been lying on the hearthstone and laid them in it.

With a small shovel she piled ashes upon the small heap of fire until only a few sparks were visible. The darkness of the room was now such that William could scarcely distinguish the form of Mother

Juliet. As for light, the windows—one on each side of the door behind him—were blind with grime and soot.

He heard her rubbing her hands together. Then he saw both her arms uplifted and moving now up, now down.

Soon a brilliant curving line appeared on them. He could descry the movement of her hands presently as they rubbed a snake the full length of its arabesque form.

The more she rubbed the brighter shone the snake. When it was shining from mouth to tail she wound the serpent round her neck. Ceaselessly she crooned her low, somnolent chant.

Similarly she handled the other snakes until she had wound one round her waist, one on each arm and had stretched the largest of them in a hoop that surrounded her crouched shape. The head of the snake around her throat rose above the seeress's head as she leaned forward and with flying fingers began to pluck the feathers from the dead pigeons.

The feathers she tossed into the fire. Those that were nipped by the smoldering embers flared up and burned, yielding a sickening odor.

To William she was as a mound of snakes, winding in endless circles and glittering with a light that was cold as snow upon his small, sunken eyes.

He heard her tear apart the bones of the pigeons. He saw her bend down low and knew from the softer tearing sound what she was doing. The fateful moment of divination was at hand.

The overseer seated against the door clacked his teeth together and began to breathe in grunts through his flat nostrils. He was bent over now, unconsciously swinging his head from side to side with the swaying of the flaming coils all about Mother Juliet.

"What noise is that?" William asked in his high-pitched whisper.

"Little birds' bones that crack so loud in the chimney when the fire bites them means something going amiss, always, William," the seeress answered in singsong.

The overseer paused before he dare inquire:

"But what goes amiss?"

As they talked not once did she alter her position before the fire where she pored over the entrails of the pigeons. Nor did he venture more than to cast a glance occasionally at her illuminated bulk. Most of

the time his eyes were fixed on the floor, because his head would sway whenever he glimpsed the serpents writhing about her.

"And the little boat that went to Honduras?" she queried. "You remember, William?"

"Yes, Mother Juliet," he whispered.

"To bring the guns to make William master of this island? You remember, William?"

"Yes, Mother Juliet."

"Let me see what the secrets of these little birds tell of that boat from Honduras," and she maundered over the contents of the bowl from which she had taken her bread and milk.

"Don't they say she came in safe and sure?" William demanded sharply.

"Let me see! Let me see!" the seeress mumbled with irritating slowness.

"They got to say that, anyway, or they lie!" William whispered impatiently.

He could hold his tongue no longer, feeling an adverse fate impending, although not this particular one.

"Don't you accuse the birds like that, or they'll never tell you nothing," Mother Juliet growled in a low voice.

At the same time she wriggled the snakes about her arms and head so swiftly that in William's eyes the room was full of their flashing, sinuous streaks of light.

"No! You hear me, Mother Juliet?" the man protested. "I never did accuse them birds. I only said the little boat made safe harbor in the fog last night down along here on the east shore.

"The three men I sent landed their cargo safe, too. But they did not slip into the Settlement till to-day, after I had been here and left the pigeons for you."

"There was only three you sent, William," the seeress suggested in mollified tone, droning each word.

"Jake Haas, Henry—Black Henry, you know—and Sailor Pete—the three men I could trust in every way."

"And they didn't bring a stranger with them?" asked Mother Juliet.

"To trick us? Catch them letting on to a stranger! As it was they had to be awfully a buying of those things, and it cost a lot of money and trouble.

"Catch them letting on to a stranger! Two whites and a black a buying such stores. No. The trouble the birds say is, coming can't be about the boat or the cargo. Anyway not yet."

Mother Juliet had begun to croon again, her head slightly inclined toward the door of the timber shed.

She interrupted herself to prophesy from the reading she made of the contents of the bowl that she pawed jerkily with her fat fingers. But first she must ponder, mumbly, and think of a matter William was far from suspecting.

The stroke she had counted on making through the discovery of the man on the beach had failed. There had been, then, only three men in the small boat. They had landed secretly and safely with their contraband purchases.

When William assured her that they had brought no stranger with them she believed him absolutely. The men would not deceive William, for they had a respect and fear of him equal to that which he himself had for her.

Nevertheless, the castaway was a stranger. Neither she nor Jolly George could identify him as one of the small colony on the island.

She began to mumble in singsong as she slowly wound and unwound the snakes in all manner of coils around her arms, her neck and her waist.

"First and last and over and over again," she declaimed for William's benefit, "I see a stranger who is coming to the island. First and last and always the same sign."

"Is he a friend of the Settlement or of the folks in the big house?" William whispered in his high voice.

The question nonplused the seeress, but only momentarily.

"Strangers may be friends, strangers may be enemies," she mumbled sleepily.

On her crooked arms three of the snakes were twisting about her head so that their phosphorescent gleam looked like monstrous, horrible, disheveled hair.

"It is for you and me to make this stranger our friend."

"How? How?" quickly demanded William, to whom the unsought introduction of a stranger on the island presaged only mischance and evil.

"First we must find him," the seeress responded.

Mumbling, Mother Juliet wound the snakes up on her forearms, flying swift as a wheel. They might have been so many strips of rags. Each of them she laid tenderly, however, in its place on the hearth; then called to William:

"Open that door! Open it! Something is happening now. I can't tell you more. Open the door!"

The seeress's head fell forward and her ball-like shape shook convulsively.

From the door of the timber shed the hollow sound again traveled across the room.

The overseer was on his feet and had flung wide open the door leading out into the path. He stood, eyelids fluttering, even before the subdued daylight of the grove, and drew his first deep breath since he had entered the house. He was glad to get away from the woman, whom he thought to be in a fit.

Clang! Clang! Clang! There was no mistaking the sound of the ship's bell on the pedestal.

"Hark ye! Hark ye!" cried William, turning and leaning part way into the house.

He accompanied her along the winding path. They found Jolly George at the pedestal. The youth sat on the ground, pressing his arms against his stomach and proclaiming the fact in exhausted voice that he was "half-killed with pain."

"What did you ring that bell for, you idiot?" William snarled.

"You sha'n't hurt me," the boy retorted, struggling to his feet and sidling away. "I've got something won't let you hurt me," and he slipped his hand into his trousers' pocket to catch hold of the white box.

Mother Juliet interposed soothingly. The overseer drew back, glaring vengefully at the boy from small wicked red eyes.

"Son," murmured the seeress, stroking his back, "tell me."

Jolly George pulled the battered straw hat from his head and excitedly swinging it this way and that, blurted out his message as fast as he could find the words.

"Black Henry's locked up at the big house. I see him, I bet. Captain Neville white like fish-belly with mad. Miss Susan cryin' and her makin' believe not to. Everybody in the big house all knocked silly. Whisperin' and sneakin' everywhere. Talk about guns and a boat. I listen wherever I can and keep out of the way 'cos everybody want to hit somebody."

"Where is Black Henry locked up, son?" Mother Juliet inquired, taking his hand and patting it as if to calm the boy.

"I'm jess takin' a little nap in the barn after dinner," he continued. "I hear yellin'

and bad words awful down-stairs. I wake up and listen.

"Then I looks down from the loft and I see Captain Neville and Michael Sands draggin' in Black Henry by the hands. Henry he's kickin' awful but they have little chains on his wrists and he can't get away."

"Michael throws him down on the floor and puts big chains on his feet. Then they puts him in that old empty box-stall what they don't use. They locks the door with a big lock and goes away."

As Jolly George went on with his story William's eyes flashed. His features were distorted with rage and occasionally the breath came hissing between his teeth. But Mother Juliet remained sleepy and soothing, persuading from the boy all he had to tell.

"I'm scared to stay in that barn," Jolly George went on. "I wait for a while, though. I hops down the ladder and I bet I slipped some. An' *bump!* I lands on the floor. I'm worse scared then."

"I sits still and listens. Black Henry moves in there in the empty box-stall. I can hear his chains. He listens, too, I bet. Then he says:

"Who are you?"

"He's wild mad. I tells him it's only Jolly George and prays to mercy he won't give me away."

"He says he won't give me away if I'll run fast to the Settlement and tell you something."

"I says I will. So he gives me this message; I been sayin' it all the way so I won't forget."

"He says, Black Henry says:

'Cargo and voyage known. Cargo not all found yet. Steel stores safe. I am in irons.'

"Jess them few little words—that's all he says, Black Henry."

"And that's what you were fearing, Mother Juliet," William remarked, ominously repressed in his manner as he considered the message.

"That's what the birds told me," the seeress responded humbly but with assurance. "The sooner we know bad tidings and bad signs, William, the better."

"Right-o!" the overseer admitted, and gritted his teeth.

He was comforted to learn that the "steel stores"—the rifles and the ammunition—had not been seized.

"Captain Neville wins the first hand," William went on. "He'll fight harder for the second.

"Come along, boy!" he added, grabbing Jolly George's hand.

The giant overseer led off the boy at such long, rapid strides that Jolly George was forced to break into a trot every so often to keep abreast of him.

CHAPTER V.

THE SEERESS SERVES.

WHEELING about when she was sure they were gone for the present, Mother Juliet went back briskly toward her house. Nor did she smother a feeling of triumph in her breast—against which she pressed the diamond rings, cool and sharp—for the cast of luck that had drawn William Ransom away so opportunely.

At six feet from her door she stood stock-still, surprised yet self-poised.

Leaning shakily against one side of the doorway, she saw the castaway, his emaciated body naked to the waist, his handsome head lolling to right and left as he searched his surroundings with fevered eyes.

With feline cautiousness she studied him, advancing a short step. He could not see her, for his eyes were blinded from the darkness of the timber shed.

The seeress, no longer a necromancer, but solely a crafty, calculating woman, ventured within arm's reach of him.

He tottered as if to fall. She supported him in her stout grip and braced him against the outer wall of the house.

"Who are you?" he asked in a voice faint and husky, looking down at her wonderingly.

"A friend—your friend, sir," Mother Juliet assured him meekly.

He tried to laugh ironically, but his voice broke in a falsetto shriek.

"A friend—my friend!" he echoed. "I haven't one in the world!"

"You're not allowed to say that to me, sir," she returned, "after what I've done for you and am doing."

"Then why did you let them shut me up in that black cell? I am choking for want of air. But I dug my way out all right. Go inside there and see where I smashed down the wall.

"I would have torn a hole in the roof of the grave to breathe this air again, to see

trees—and the sky. The sky is still up there, I know, but I'm all fagged out. I've been trying to lift my head to look at it, but I can't."

He smiled sadly.

"Ever see such a baby for a big fellow?" he asked.

"You're sick, sir, but I'm going to nurse you well again."

"Sick? I should say I am! Why, I'm so sick I saw a lot of snakes in there by the fire! Think of a man that never drinks—who hasn't had a drink of water, even, since Heaven knows when—think of him seeing snakes in the daytime! Ask me if I'm sick!"

He rubbed his eyes wearily with the back of his hand. Then he added:

"But I want to tell you one thing. They have no right to shut me up. You wouldn't understand. Nobody can or will—yet I never touched one red cent of all that money.

"Now let me sit down here and watch the trees and the grass. I feel as if I never want to see anything but trees and land as long as I live."

Mother Juliet eased him to a seat on the ground by the door. She went into the house and returned immediately with two pillows which she set at the small of his back.

The man looked up smiling, as if in appreciation, and muttered:

"Thank you. Put me down as H. A. Danforth. Got it?"

The woman bowed jerkily and repeated: "H. A. Danforth, sir."

"You won't bother me any more about my name, will you? You said you were my friend."

"No, sir; I won't bother you."

"What's your name?"

"Juliet—they call me Mother Juliet."

"That's a good one, too."

The man laughed mirthlessly and let his head fall back against the wall, closing his eyes.

When he was again conscious of her presence he saw spread beside him a flaming red table-cloth on which were laid a bowl of milk with bread in it, a dishful of eggs that seemed half-boiled and were highly speckled with chopped herbs and a pot of steaming coffee with a capacious cup and saucer beside it.

Mother Juliet tended him with all the knowing care of a nurse. When he showed

signs of being too weak to tire himself with taking the food he so sorely needed she urged him gently to eat. The coffee he accepted with greatest relish, although he remarked to Mother Juliet that it had a perfumed taste.

"All our coffee tastes the same," the woman explained, lying glibly rather than confess to the drops of cordial she had put into the pot to render the coffee more pungent.

She noticed a drowsiness coming over him after he had finished his repast, and proposed that she lay a blanket on the grass by the door where he might rest.

"Thanks, no; I think I've slept enough," he informed her. "I'm giving you an awful lot of trouble, Madame Juliet."

"Call me Mother Juliet," she corrected with a grin that showed a large mouthful of teeth. "You ain't no trouble, especially now you ain't feverish. But you got to rest, 'cos the fever comes back sometimes."

For all the outlandish make-up of the woman in her yellow satin, black and scarlet turban and hundreds of tinkling ornaments of clinking metal, the man was interested profoundly in the facile serving-manners of Mother Juliet.

The noting of these details of her appearance caused him suddenly to realize his own. He looked away rather bashfully and said:

"All I need now is some clothes, don't you think?"

"You'll have them to-morrow, Mr. Danforth," Mother Juliet answered promptly.

He glanced quickly toward her, as if he had not heard aright. Then he rejoined:

"Of course—to-morrow! But you know I don't know where I'll get any money to pay you for all you've done for me."

"We'll think about that when you're strong again, sir."

The man held up his hands before him and moved each finger up and down, studying it attentively.

"I did have some rings on two of these fingers—big, ugly rings, the kind circus men wear, but worth a little pot of money if sold or pawned. That's why I wore them. You can always turn diamonds into money, you know, without difficulty, but if you're carrying checks around or letters of credit—"

He halted a second and concluded:

"Well, they're gone—that's all there is to it."

"Mr. Danforth, don't you go aworryin'

about rings now," Mother Juliet begged of him, the while she held her hands against her breast, feeling those rings as a miser thumbs over often-counted treasure. "I want you to lie here and rest, as I told you, in the fresh air. Soon's evening comes it's cool in this country."

She tarried for no refusal, but hastened into the house and procured two large blankets. The drowsiness which she had noticed to be steadily increasing now fell upon him heavily. He consented to lie between the blankets. She complimented him on the gain in strength he showed in managing them for himself.

"You don't know anything about me," he told her as he lay down. "Why are you doing so much for me? I've told you I haven't a sou."

"Because if I didn't do it, Mr. Danforth, sir," Mother Juliet answered simply, "you would have been dead by now."

"By George!" the man murmured presently as he laid his head on the pillows. "I can never forget you, Mother Juliet. You've done more than you think in what you've done for me, and I'll make it good to you."

"Nonsense, sir," she returned, grinning. "You jess sleep and get strong."

The grin was transmuted into a sly smile of secret joy as she left him and went into the house.

Captain Neville had put Black Henry in irons, she was thinking. William Ransom was a man bigger than Black Henry and with twice his brains.

The overseer should have the stranger, who, she had promised, would appear on the island. He would be a friend and ally of the folk in the Settlement.

And when the day of victory dawned for them—

Her dream of triumph abruptly traversed the wide sea to the great, gay city, where she saw herself lounging at evening on a balcony odorous with lilacs and wistaria. She was a great lady, resplendent in clothes and jewels.

Beside her sat Jolly George "dressed like a prince," as she saw him. He was playing his guitar or mandolin and singing to her. People passing in the wide, shady street were stopping to listen to the wonder of his voice; and when they asked who the singer was they would be told it was her son.

In days gone by Mother Juliet, then

Juliet simply, had been stewardess on a boat sailing from New Orleans, in which city also she had worked in good hotels. This is why she was able to place H. A. Danforth as a gentleman after having talked with him.

Her subtler sense suggested to her furthermore that he was a gentleman in difficulties of some sort. The business of her encroaching middle age was to assist people in doubts or difficulties. And her memory was long enough to be alive to the fact that gentlemen pay when they can, and if they pay at all pay well.

Thus it happened that when sudden evening closed about Big Twin Island, brooding with omen and menace of tragic trouble, as well as on Little Twin Island—that tree-specked promontory standing on end beyond the lagoon, where no human being had fixed his habitation—the magic of cleanliness and order had transformed the interior of the timber shed back of Mother Juliet's house.

Hither she led Danforth by the rearward path, trimmed of its overgrowth with the sickle and shears she kept in continuous use to prevent the trail to her house from being smothered by rank, weedy vegetation. Willingly he entered the room, the door of which he had broken open in his delirium when he stifled for want of air and groped wildly in the darkness on the floor at the foot of his mattress.

In place of the mattress she had substituted her cot-bed. By the light of the lantern she gave him he could discern the glow of shining window-panes—the eyes of a home if only a hovel.

Danforth surveyed the room with its low pent roof. It was as sparse of any but necessary furniture as a monk's cell—and as clean.

"On the other side of that door, sir," Mother Juliet explained, lifting a faded red table-cloth to show it, "is my house. My wardrobe stands against the door in my house. No one can bother you from there even if they was to try to make things warm for me."

"Why—why should anybody bother you?" asked Danforth.

"You must know that and you must take my advice about it, too," she pursued respectfully, yet with a trace of her seeress air. "There is great things agoin' wrong on this island. You're a stranger. Nobody knows about you exceptin' me." (There

was no need to consider Jolly George at the moment.) "Now, strangers is suspected, and you ain't got a gun or nothin'."

"But any one can come right in here by the path, it seems to me," Danforth remarked.

"You didn't notice, then, how we had to crouch down and 'most creep before we got on the path, Mr. Danforth?"

"Oh, yes; I noticed that."

"Nobody can pick that path but me, I guess, sir—not even you the first time you ever get outside it. But I'm only telling you all this to protect you. The shores of this island is being watched night and day and—"

"There wasn't much to fear from a man in my condition," Danforth interrupted. "Still, it was lucky for me that you found me."

He sat down on the cot.

"You're dog-tired, I know. Good night. I'll fetch you breakfast and clothes in the morning. And please, sir, mind what I say or I can't help you at all."

Mother Juliet repeated the jerky bow he had noticed before and withdrew backward, pulling the door shut.

Danforth pulled his fingers briskly across his face, stirring all the nerves. He wanted to be sure he was not again in a fever-dream.

"When was it?" he asked himself inwardly—"to-day, yesterday or when, that I felt the boat filling and I jumped and swam, to wake on a broiling gridiron of beach? Now I'm in a dinky little shack, clean as a new hat, and a fat gipsy, who talks of mysteries like a fortune-teller and cares for me like a nurse, makes me the bow of a superannuated French maid and tells me she'll serve breakfast and new clothes in the morning!"

CHAPTER VI.

ISLAND POLITICS.

HARDLY had Mother Juliet taken leave of Mr. H. A. Danforth than all her resummoned graces of a trained servant evaporated from her very person. She was once more the waddling, sleepy-eyed seeress, prudently returning to the known path to her house by making a wide détour.

It was apparent to William Ransom when she appeared before him at the pedestal, gray in the light of far stars, that she

had come from the eastern beach near her grove, where he knew she often prowled in quest of he knew not what. Not all the tokens through which Mother Juliet wrought wonders for her devotees were revealed to them.

"You, William!" she droned in singsong. "It's good you've come back. Things are clearer to me. Jess as soon as I found out what it was that was a fightin' between you and me this afternoon I could see every-thing plain."

"I wish I could," the overseer piped shrilly, though the humor in his statement was wholly sardonic. "Captain Neville's got Black Henry tied up, and he calls it mutiny. Jake Haas and Sailor Pete, they're both seamen and sees that thing 'mutiny' as something pretty bad for us. What d'you think?"

"Mutiny?" echoed Mother Juliet. "Mutiny! That is pretty bad, but it could be worse."

"That's just what I tell Jake and Pete, but they won't believe me. They're for going at the captain and the big house to-night. I'm puzzled all account of what you told me about that stranger, who's maybe with us or maybe against us."

"How many of you folks are they, now Black Henry's taken?" asked Mother Juliet.

"Jake and Pete and myself; that's three. Then there's about two dozen of the blacks."

A Briton was William Ransom, though a mulatto. Jake and Pete, both of whom were white, he kept in a class with himself.

"The blacks, them as works the coconuts, you know," he went on to explain, "are all primed for us. But then if I can't hold Jake and Pete in hand why they are likely to bust the blacks off with them and act sudden-like."

"Too quick—too slow is no way to go," the seeress droned admonishingly.

"Then, too," the overseer went on, "they talk like they're going to act rough. Mother Juliet, I want to manage this job with no more rough doings than are positively necessary."

"As long as the captain's got that wireless up at the house—and it's workin'—why he can fetch folks at us from all over creation. And we can't afford no outside interference, can we?"

"That's sensible. The wireless," murmured Mother Juliet.

Yet she did not take much stock in this

remark of William's. It was her firm conviction that the wireless was mere guess-work, lucky chance—not half so accurate of presage as the entrails of a pigeon, and similarly to be maneuvered.

"Have they been moochin' round you from the big house this morning?" she asked after reflection.

"Captain sent word by Jolly George he wants us all on parade before the big house at nine in the morning," William replied. "He wrote me a letter, sayin' he wants to know whether we obey orders or don't obey them."

"That's what brought up the row with me and Jake and Pete. They're for going up against the big house right off to-night. Recollecting what you said about a stranger coming to this island, I set my foot hard down."

"Better wait, says I, and they says—not meaning no disrespect to you, Mother Juliet—they says I can come and have fifteen minutes with you to talk about the stranger arriving or anything else, but they don't believe one little word about him. So away I hurry."

The seeress emitted a low cry. It was the utterance of a tigress rather than that of a human being.

She threw her hands wildly above her head and gazed upward at the innumerable gold stars of the serene blue sky. It was the stars that she seemed to be addressing, not the huge, awed figure of William Ransom as she muttered sullenly:

"They mock at me! They mock at me! Stupid fools that have never been brave enough to see what I can see and do!

"They may laugh—let them! I shall laugh, too. And my laugh will bring trouble and sickness and bad luck on all the Settlement, from the little children upward."

"Blood drying in the heart—feet that wither on the ground—arms dropping off for rottenness, and in the eyes a fire that blazes outside and burns to madness within!

"White man, black man, yellow—all's the same and sure. By my fire to-day I have seen it—by the stars to-night I see it—the stranger will prove my words true!

"Let them laugh, and you laugh! I laugh with you and against you."

A weird gurgling noise issued from her mouth. She clapped her hands on her hips as if bursting with merriment, and started quickly down the path to her cottage.

For a moment William Ransom was spell-

bound. The sight of Mother Juliet's horribly malignant convulsion of features in the starlight—teeth glistening and eyes rolling until only the whites showed—had paralyzed his every nerve.

When he saw her move away so rapidly he pulled himself together with a supreme effort and actually leaped after her. He clutched her skirt and groveled at her feet.

"You go away and let me laugh my fill," she cried jeeringly, and thrust from her the giant who on his knees measured as high as her breast.

"I ain't laughin', nor I ain't never goin' to laugh," protested William in high piteous tones, grabbing her wrist. "I've been a good man to you, and I've made all them blacks good, too."

"Don't they always come to you and ask you to read their signs? Don't they do what you say for them to do? Don't they bring you whatever you ask them for?"

"It's jess Jake and Pete that's stampedin' them and their women asayin' because Black Henry's put in irons, they will be the next."

"And they will be," Mother Juliet retorted, "and serve them fine and right for not harking to what the signs say now."

"But they will hark to you," William assured her, "if you only come up to my place and tell them."

William stood up, still holding her hand, and turned as if to lead her with him to the cabin.

Mother Juliet drew back, asking haughtily:

"What do you think I am? Why didn't you bring these men with you if they'll hark to me?"

"The others would 'a' come fast enough," he said hesitantly, "but not Jake or Pete—and it's for them I want you most to go with me."

"You promise to sure do all I say if I go?" she inquired.

"If you help me I can do anything—and will, for you, Mother Juliet," he told her promptly.

"Then you stand here till I get my umbrella."

"Please make haste, Mother Juliet. You know the captain is waiting for my answer."

The seeress had waddled swiftly beyond reach of his voice and entered her hut.

All was black here save for a speck of light amid the embers on the hearth. She listened suddenly and sharply toward the

timber shed, for she had heard, or thought she heard, a faint, sibilant sound as of a voice in a whisper.

She made a step toward the connecting door to be sure the wardrobe she had placed against it was still in place.

How she could have miscalculated the distance it was from her Mother Juliet did not pause to puzzle out. Every square foot of the room was familiar and the gloom she was accustomed to.

Yet her shoulder bumped against the edge of the wardrobe and rattled its tall, light frame when, in her judgment, it should have been still half a yard away from her.

Almost involuntarily Mother Juliet put her hand to her shoulder and listened again toward the timber shed. All was silent there; but from her own door at the back she heard the high voice of William, who pleaded piteously:

"Please, Mother Juliet, if you'll make haste? The captain's waiting for the answer to his note, you know."

"I'll make haste, but you must not disturb me thinkin'," she replied testily.

At the same time she bent down and took her umbrella from the bed. Then, crouching before the fire for a moment, she mumbled some words unintelligible to William, the while she seemed to be half-opening and shutting her umbrella and lifting and letting fall one arm as if she were pouring something into the umbrella.

Almost immediately she rose and went straight out the door past William. He caught up with her and walked alongside without further speech.

When they issued from the grove and climbed the upland he observed that she was carrying the umbrella point down and gripped tightly at the tip of the ribs. Yet it looked bulky as if not fully closed.

Down the western side of the upland the squat figure of the seeress and the monumental shape of William Ransom passed in the night like two grotesque silhouettes. Out upon the smooth stretch of meadow, steadily brisk of tread, they advanced nearer and nearer to the Settlement's half-dozen white cottages that lay scattered like dice thrown from a box.

Abruptly Mother Juliet stopped when they were within a stone's throw of William's abode. The windows were open in his living room.

Brilliant light glowed within and the sound of uncouth but jubilant song rioted

on the clear air against the regular melodious chime of waves on the beach of near-by Settlement Cove.

"You, William," the seeress instructed him, "hold my umbrella for a second. My clothes is all twisted runnin' like this."

The overseer put forth his hand, which she placed in a grasp round the tips of the ribs in the same manner she herself had held the umbrella.

"Keep it tight now," she added. "My conjur pets is inside and if they was to fall out the dear children might lose theirselves out here so far from home."

William felt the sluggish, wriggling weight of the snakes as they stirred in being passed from her hand to his. A slow shudder stole through his veins.

Mother Juliet gave her yellow satin waist a jerk or two, as she did to her skirt. Then she adjusted her scarlet and black turban, so that it looked half a foot higher than before.

She took the umbrella from William, cautioning him:

"Nobody dares talk with me, William, till I've sat at your fire and got my thoughts goin' all together. You remember, I speak first—but no more now. I must think."

They started again. The seeress was thinking just as hard as William believed.

She was thinking that however she might succeed or fail in influencing Jake Haas and Sailor Pete, still she would this night obtain clothes from William for the man in the timber shed. Jake and Pete could laugh at her powers and defy her predictions if they liked, but they would unquestionably change their way of thinking when they saw a stranger appear as if by magic from her hands.

Thus her thoughts were revolving when William pushed the door of his cottage wide open and standing at the threshold announced in high, quick, nervous voice:

"Gentlemen, Mother Juliet is here!"

And abruptly the boisterous singing died.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WOMAN OF THE SHADOWS.

"THIS shuts out everything!" H. A. Danforth had told himself with relief when he lay back to sleep after Mother Juliet had taken leave of him with her ceremonious jerky bow.

She had promised that no one should in-

trude upon him in the timber shed. The care she had given to the sun-scald on his breast and arms and legs and the light, nutritious dishes with which she had plied him so devotedly combined to incite his naturally robust constitution to fight spontaneously back to normal vigor and health.

Yet sleep was what he wanted most of all, it seemed to him. So Mother Juliet had hardly passed by her secret path from the rear of the grove before he was dozing again restfully, although he had slept a couple of hours or more during the afternoon.

She had closed the door tight at her going, but had left one of the windows open, through which he could hear now and again, as it was borne on the breeze, the eternal song of the chanting Caribbean. It was his enemy no more, but a soothing friend that lulled him to repose.

The very darkness of the room rendered his sense of hearing more responsive to its croon. He fell fast asleep and presently became aware that he was dreaming.

Were the former terrors returning to him in the night?

There was a scraping sound—a breath of fresher air as if the door had been opened. Some one spoke very gently, almost huskily.

Or was it a stiffer breeze in the thick foliage outside his shelter?

Some one was moving around and about his bed, swiftly, stealthily.

He must be cautious. Mother Juliet had assured him—had she not?—that no one would bother him here. Of course.

So he tried to rouse himself, but could not. Surely he must be dreaming! If he were not he would be able to spring up on his cot-bed and convinced himself that the shadowy presence he could not see but felt moving about the room was only a figment of his feverish imagination.

At times everybody has dreams like this from which it is impossible to escape, however one strive, except by slipping off into another dream less real yet just as much a dream. Thus his mind argued subconsciously. He felt but could not see the shadowy presence approach him while he waited for the next shift of dreaming.

It came. He welcomed it. He was in the open boat again, he was about to grapple for his life and for the last bit of bread and drop of water with the last remaining of the Portuguese sailors.

It was all plain as print to him in his new dream; and he welcomed it because he knew, although he could not awaken, that he was safe in the timber shed of Mother Juliet where no one would intrude.

The shadowy presence bent over him. He could almost see it now.

It leaned down, just as the Portuguese sailor had done when his knee was on Danforth's chest in the boat. Danforth struck out his arms for the sailor's throat just as he had done on the deserted sea with one bit of bread and some drops of water to share between them.

The man had reached for Danforth's face—had touched it even!

It was only a dream and he did not know for a second that he was awake. His eyes were wide open, yet the room seemed blacker in darkness than before.

A stifled cry of terror had startled him from his dream.

He had caught his fancied antagonist, not by the throat as he had taken the Portuguese sailor, but under the arms. And it was no dreamed-of sailor, but a woman, lithe and strong, whose smooth cheek and fine hair lay against his bare breast.

(To Be Continued.)

All He Had to Give



by
George Foxhall

A FISHING TRIP off Sandy Hook, during which the only thing he caught was a very complete education in *mal-de-mer*, was the nearest to Europe that Richard Brenning had ever been. And yet Mr. Brenning probably knew more about Europe than any man in America.

For forty years Mr. Brenning had specialized on Europe in the Foreign Travel department of the Universal Tourist Agency. He had studied not only the high-ways you can read of but the byways you can hear of.

He had absorbed Europe. He could tell you, without confronting you with a stack of time-tables, the best way to get from Trieste to Niiniovgorod, and could call every point of interest on the way by its first name. The education had provided him with an excellent livelihood, but it had also cost money, for in acquiring it Mr. Brenning had done much entertaining.

The cost had troubled Mr. Brenning not in the least. Travel to Europe, he had argued, is a more constant, reliable and progressive commodity than the cotton crop. Therefore he had taken no thought for the morrow.

And the morrow brought the Great War. One morning, Vanron, the president of the agency, sent for him.

"There isn't much business in your department just now, Mr. Brenning," he began.

"The war has slowed things up a good deal," agreed Brenning. "There'll be a big rush when the war's over, however."

"Precisely, but it doesn't seem likely to be over for quite a while yet, and in the meantime the agency has to live, and on much reduced profits. I'm afraid we shall have to cut down a good deal."

"I suppose so, though I hate to let any of my young men go."

"Precisely!" again Mr. Vanron remarked, showing signs of discomfort.

"How long have you been with us, Mr. Brenning?" he asked, after a moment's pause.

"Thirty-eight years and seven months," answered Brenning.

Mr. Vanron coughed unnecessarily and toyed with a paper-knife.

"The fact is," said he at last, "we are very anxious to be as fair as possible with everybody. You have had employment here for nearly forty years, and for a very long period you have been drawing a handsome salary—a very handsome salary. Handsome salaries are a luxury the agency can no longer afford in its Foreign Department. Neither can it afford to lose the vigorous young men who are just becoming really valuable to it, because, as you say, when the courses of travel are again opened there is going to be an enormous amount of work. In short, we feel, Mr. Brenning, that we shall be causing less hardship by giving you your liberty than by discharging two or three of our young fellows to save the same amount of money."

For a moment Mr. Brenning sat perfectly still and stared stupidly at his superior. A dizzying paralysis seemed to have gripped his body and mind. He struggled against the chaos that was enveloping his ideas and the struggle left him white-lipped and trembling.

"I think you are making a great mistake, sir," he said, in a dry whisper, "I am, as you know, considered the greatest expert in America on European travel."

"I know, my dear fellow, but we have no European travel. You might as well be an expert in the Martian Canal System for all the benefit it is to us, and when the war is over the whole system of European travel will have to be revised. We shall need young men to learn it all over again. You are an old man, Mr. Brenning, and you may congratulate yourself that your life has been a very comfortable success."

"Yes, sir, I see your point of view quite clearly," answered Brenning. "Of course you understand it is a great blow to me to break associations that have grown up through so many years. This has come rather suddenly. I thought I was good for another ten years yet. I think, if you don't mind, I'll take the day off. I feel a little dazed."

Vanron had not expected that the old

man would take the "release" so heavily. He found himself a little impatient about it.

"I don't see why you should consider that the firm owes you indefinite years of employment," he said. "You have been valuable, and you have been paid on that scale. Unless you have been extravagant you must be very comfortably off, but the agency can hardly let that enter into its affairs. Of course we are very sorry to see you go."

As Brenning shut the door behind him he realized the crushing force of one remark that the president had made. In fact it was the only one that seemed to linger in his memory.

"You are an old man!"

The smooth and prosperous routine of Brenning's life had never taken account of this fact before. Age had come upon him without oppression. He had lived well but not intemperately and his well nourished body had repaid him by retaining sleekness and vigor.

In a moment all that seemed to fall away from him. His face became pale and drawn. The brightness of his eyes was the fever of fear and despair.

He had counted on those remaining ten years to prepare for that vaguely anticipated retirement. For a year he had been trying to reduce the number of three or four dollar dinners that his numerous friends drew from and returned to him, but while one remains actively in the center of things it is not easy to cut down a large acquaintanceship that has been built up through many years, and so far he had not been very successful. Fifteen dollars a week for the room with bath which he occupied in a comfortable and dignified hotel, he had always considered modest.

He had occupied the same room for twenty years, since the marriage of his son and his subsequent removal to the Middle West had broken up the semblance of home that they had maintained for five years after the death of his wife.

Suddenly he realized that that twenty-five years had been an eternity of loneliness. The toll which the constant round of business and companionship had seemed to rob it of had all the time been dragging from his unseen reserve. He was an old man! A lonely, desolate old man!

This was the second blow the war had dealt him. The first had deprived him of what savings he had accumulated. He had

always been fond of European railroads, naturally, and knew a great deal about them. The war had made the seven thousand dollars' worth or more of bonds that he held so much waste paper.

He walked up Fifth Avenue, unconscious of the throng around him. He seemed to be no part of it. He seemed to have no kinship with or attachment to anything in the world. He was suddenly lonely, and suddenly weak.

Still, there was Andrew, his son. As he left the office he had slipped a letter in his pocket, dimly noting that it was from Andrew. He went into Madison Square Park and sat on a bench to read it, and as he read, the color that had been returning to his cheeks receded once more.

MY DEAR FATHER:

"Although I have been in difficulties for the past two years I have refrained from troubling you with them beyond letting you know, of course, as you have seen on your two visits, that Madge has been more or less seriously ill most of the time. I am glad to say that the last operation has placed her on the way to permanent recovery. The expense, however, and the fact that the breaking down of my own health has handicapped my work for the past year, have brought me to my present very precarious condition.

Unless I can raise three hundred dollars by the night of the twelfth, to pay interest on a mortgage, we shall lose our home. Madge knows nothing of this. I know the blow, coming at this time, would be fatal to her, in spite of her wonderful courage, and the loss of her would, I think, be fatal to me also.

I am in despair. I have tried every means I can think of, without success. I know you must have had severe losses with your European railroads, but perhaps you can raise it for me if you haven't the sum by you.

I will not plead that I have never asked you for anything before, because my reason has never been a fear of straining your affection, but I will ask you to believe that this is life and death for me and for my poor wife.

Your loving son,
ANDREW.

With a groan Brenning folded the letter and put it in his pocket. He took out his check-book and looked at the balance figured on the last stub—three hundred and twenty dollars and seventeen cents!

Without hesitation he got up and walked towards the bank, some three or four blocks away.

"I am an old man," he murmured. "It is the young who must be kept alive. I am an old man!"

What the future held for him he did not

know. He hardly thought of it. He seemed to have come to a great chasm called "Old Age," beyond which was—nothing.

Perhaps he could go and live out the remainder of the vacuity with his son. At one time this would have been acutely distressing, but now it seemed not to matter.

He had decided that he would get the money and send it, in cash, by registered mail. Time was important, and Andrew would probably find this even more satisfactory than a certified check. He drew out the entire balance.

Then he made for the subway. He would run up to his room, write a little note of encouragement, and mail the package at the post-office near by. It was the noon hour rush, but the old man hardly noticed the jostling crowd.

As he climbed the exit stairs at 66th Street the unaccustomed weariness made him grasp the rail. Somebody in a hurry behind him thrust past and pushed him so that his arm was pressed tight across his body.

Mechanically his mind registered a sense of strangeness in the pressure. Instead of the usual leathery resistance of his pocket-book the coat was soft and flat.

With a feverish stab he thrust his hand into his pocket to find it empty.

With a hoarse cry he swung around and hurled himself madly down the stairs, scattering people left and right, unconscious of any object or of any desire in the world but to stop the train and wrest his precious money from the cruel fingers that had robbed him. But there was no train.

He dashed past the ticket-chopper regardless of his loud shout, and stared insensibly up the track. Then with a groan he came to himself and realized the futility of what he was doing.

He ran to the ticket-window and reported his loss in frantic, almost inarticulate sentences. Before he had finished the ticket-agent had the telephone in his hand.

"Too late to get them at Seventy-Second, sir," he reported, "and they probably left the car there. We'll send detectives through the train as soon as possible, though, and perhaps they can pick up somebody they know. You'd better report it at a police-station right away, sir."

His trembling legs almost refused the second ascent of the steps, but the despair that weakened his body drove his will. He sank into a chair in the police-station, and

in a moment a kind-hearted sergeant was beside him.

"The old boy's all in," he murmured. "Here y'are, mister, take a sip of water."

"My pocket has been picked," gasped Brenning when the cold fluid had relieved his parched throat. "They got three hundred and sixty-two dollars. It was all I had and my boy needs it—life or death for him—my son—has to have it by the twelfth—I have just lost my employment and I am an old man. I cannot do any more. It was on a subway train between Twenty-Eighth and Sixty-Sixth. For God's sake help me."

"You bet your life we will. Did you report it to the ticket-seller?"

"Yes, at Sixty-Sixth."

"Just give me your name and address and a description of the wallet and contents and we'll comb all the dips in the Greater City for you, sir. Don't be letting it worry you now."

When the entries were all made the sergeant offered another bit of advice.

"A man in your position must have a lot of friends, sir. Now if I were you I'd scout around a little and raise a loan if the boy wants the money in a hurry, because it may take a few days to round up the thieving galoot that got your roll."

"Thank you," said Brenning. "I'll just rest here a few minutes and then follow your suggestion. I was so distressed I didn't think of that."

As he sat there, one thing became clear in Brenning's mind. To borrow money he must appear as he always appeared, easy minded, placid, and prosperous. In his change pocket he found four subway tickets and sixty-three cents.

Twenty minutes later he dropped casually in on Clugston, a well-to-do importer with whom he had been on very friendly terms for a great many years. He was too wise to try to make a call at so unusual an hour seem quite accidental, so he came right to the point, briskly but easily.

"Do a little favor for me, will you, old man?" he asked. "I'm a bit short for a few days and my boy wants me to let him have three hundred in a hurry. Oblige me for thirty days."

Clugston looked up sharply and the old man's eyes quivered under the penetrating glance. To Clugston's shrewd observation that quiver of anxiety told the story of something seriously wrong.

"By Jove, I'd like to do it, Brenning," he answered, "but just think of an importer having three hundred dollars to spare at a time like this! If you'd waited a minute I'd have been trying to borrow from you."

Brenning's heart sank. Suddenly he realized that practically all his acquaintances were men who could very truthfully plead that their business had been crippled by the war. The very things that had brought him into touch with them were activities in Europe. But he would take nothing for granted. His boy's need was too imperative for that.

And so he made the dreary round. Into eight offices he dropped with his heart-breaking attempt at jauntiness, to meet the same heart-breaking refusal. Manning's was the last straw that broke down the pitiful fragment of his courage.

"Why don't you get it from your firm? I should think Vanron would let you have that much."

"Things are pretty dull and our millionaires are not making as much as they'd like."

"I suppose so. Laying anybody off?"

"One or two, I think."

"Including you, Brenning?"

Manning's eyes were looking into his accusingly, cruelly. His jaunty indifference fell from him like a cloak and revealed the haggard misery of age and despair. He nodded and rose wearily.

"Yes," he answered in a husky whisper.

"You had a right to mention that before you tried to borrow money, Brenning. I never took you for a four-flusher before."

Brenning turned on him with a moment's fire, but in a second it was gone in the absolute misery of his heart.

"My boy needs the money," was all he could think to say.

"So do I," snapped Manning. "Sorry, old man! Can't help you!" and he turned briskly to his desk.

Manning was the last. It was nearly five o'clock. He went to the subway and rode up-town once more, to Sixty-Sixth Street. Before going to the hotel he went again to the police-station. The friendly sergeant was full of encouragement but devoid of news. Brenning then went home.

As he entered the hotel he attempted to assume his old care-free manner. He had better not let the people know that there was anything wrong yet. Bristoff, the proprietor, was standing in the lobby, chatting

lazily here and there. Brenning waved him a cheerful salute and was passing on to the elevator when the clerk called him.

"A telegram for you, Mr. Brenning."

Brenning tore it open and read: "If possible please telegraph me the money to-night. Andy."

Then Brenning hardly knew what he did. It seemed as if some personality other than his own suddenly possessed him. The only thing in his mind seemed to be this all absorbing need of his boy's. Since he had read the letter, and especially since he had lost the money, it had seemed natural to him that his own trouble should be subservient to the imminent threat that was hanging over these young people who had life and romance before them.

The acuteness of his own trouble was that it kept him from remedying theirs. And now this great threat had filled all the world and taken control of him.

Suddenly the quavering, halting misery fell away from his heart. He found himself as cool and self-possessed as he had ever been in his life. Even more so! There was about him a cold, deliberate strength that he had never felt before. The strength of the ultimate sacrifice!

"Well, well," he said, with benevolent concern, "the boy must certainly have the money."

He drew out his watch and stood for a moment with puckered brow, tapping one hand meditatively with the folded telegram.

A slight, half-turn brought him face to face with Bristoff.

"Oh," he exclaimed, as if relieved by a sudden idea, "my boy has just wired me asking me to telegraph him three hundred dollars to-night. I wonder if you'll cash me a check for that amount? It's too late for me to get the money from the bank."

"Of course," agreed Bristoff instantly, giving the necessary instructions to the cashier.

"Better make it three-twenty if you will," suggested Brenning. "Had my pocket picked on the subway coming home," he added with a little rueful laugh. "The beggars cleaned me for somewhere round a hundred."

"You don't say! The sons of guns! Well, it's a good job you can afford to laugh about it. That helps a little, though I suppose none of us really enjoys being robbed."

"You bet we don't! Well, I'm very much obliged to you Mr. Bristoff."

"Not at all, Mr. Brenning. Glad to do it any time."

Brenning went out, and five minutes later he had telegraphed the money. Then he returned, went up to his room, and sat down to look the situation in the face.

He knew what his act meant. Exposure and imprisonment! Well, he had never in his life made a sacrifice for his boy. Andy had never needed one. Until now! And he had met the test. He had sacrificed the only thing he had left to give, his good name.

Well, his life was over and he had no further use for it, and life is dear and beautiful to the young. The result was well worth the sacrifice. He had no regrets. There was nothing left in life for him, anyway.

He went to the office next morning. All day long he expected the jingling telephone was calling him for an explanation, but no word came. Probably Bristoff was waiting to confront him with his villainy when he returned home. He would not postpone it.

Bristoff was in the lobby of the hotel, just as he had been yesterday. Brenning met his eye, waiting for the denunciation. Bristoff waved him a cheerful salute and made a pleasant remark about the weather.

The thing that was gripping Brenning's heart gripped tighter. He could not understand. Perhaps the clerk had not deposited the check yet, or the report had not come from the bank. He wished they would hurry. The suspense was torture.

He tossed about through a sleepless night, and the next day again took up the agony of listening for that cruelly delayed telephone call. It did not come.

When he got home in the evening the clerk handed him a letter. It was from Andrew; full of gratitude and affection. His eyes filled with tears as he read it, standing by the desk.

When he looked up his eyes fell on Bristoff, strolling in from the dining-room. Their eyes met. Bristoff smiled. Was the man going to torture him forever?

And so it went on through the week. Each day the haggard lines grew deeper in his cheeks and the weariness of mind and body became more intolerable. At last Saturday afternoon arrived. He had emptied his desk and severed the links that had joined him to youth and active life for forty years and he was alone in his room, utterly desolate.

He could stand it no longer. He seized the telephone and told the clerk to ask Mr. Bristoff to come to him. In a few minutes Bristoff came. Brenning shut the door behind him and then turned and faced him.

"Why do you torture me like this?" he demanded. "Why don't you accuse me, have me arrested, tried, punished, and have done with it. I—I—" His anger gave way and he dropped heavily into a chair, his head sagging forward on his breast. "I can endure no more. I am a desolate old man, and this is the end."

Bristoff wheeled a chair in front of him with a swift movement, sat down, and took the old man's hands in his own.

"I thought we would say nothing about it, my friend," he replied. "I should have understood that you would suffer, but I didn't know how to speak of it with delicacy. Forgive me!"

Brenning looked up, the wonderment of a child in his face.

"I don't understand," he whispered. "I gave you a bad check. I knew it was bad. I couldn't help it. My boy was in great trouble."

Bristoff was stroking his hands and patting them comfortingly.

"I understand, my friend," he said softly. "When I found the check was a mistake I knew there was something wrong with you and I became concerned. I called up some of your friends. Manning was the only one who knew everything. He told me what you had told him, and he told me what he had told you. I told Manning that that was a shameful way to speak to a father in trouble."

"You have been here twenty years. You have spent your money here and given us all your fine courtesy. If you are here in misfortune for twenty years more you will never get another bill. I may lend my dear friend money if I wish, so I lent you three hundred and twenty dollars. I told the cashier you had given me the money the next day."

Brenning lifted his weary, tear-stained face.

"Bristoff," he said. "Bristoff, I—" but he could say no more, the child that hovers tenderly within call of old age was in his heart and he could not speak.

"It is nothing, my friend," said Bristoff. "It is nothing! We are all children of One, and to-day is Yom Kippur, the Day of Forgiveness!"

KEEPING UP WITH POLLY

MOTHER and me, we pinched and saved
To send our girl to college.
She's home again: so well-behaved,
And burstin' full of knowledge.
"You mustn't say 'done' for 'did,' ma-maw.
It's wrong!" she says to mother.
Then next it's me: "Not 'seen,' but 'saw,'
Pa-paw; and don't use 't'other'!"

Mother and me, we don't know how
To act, it seems, or talk;
We're mighty meek and timid now,
And on our tiptoes walk
Around the house, for fear we'll make,
Through ignorunce or folly,
Some kind of clumsy slip or break
To further shame our Polly.

Mother and me, we've sort of come,
Of late, to the conclusion,
Seein' as how we're both so dumb,
That it was a delusion
Goin' to all the trouble and fuss
And cost of graduatin'
Our girl through college, when 'twas us
That needed educatin'!

Keene Thompson.



N.Y. 31754
1915

by Lawrence Perry

A THREE-PART STORY—PART TWO.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS ALREADY PRINTED.

WHILE motoring with his friend, Arnold Nealis, a wealthy young clubman, Stewart Lansing, becomes interested in an auburn-haired young woman they meet on the road driving a swift roadster bearing the license number 31754. Later at the Army and Navy Club Lansing hears Griscom, a secret service man, speak of such a young woman as a possible spy for a foreign government. Happening to catch sight of the car again, he follows it out on Long Island to a road-house, which he finds is about to be raided by Griscom and his men.

Assuming a waiter's garb he contrives to get the girl away, only to have her turn, after reaching New York, to Count Apponnetti, a foreigner in the party of whom he has deep suspicions. So he goes to the girl's apartment, she having given him her address, to see if he cannot put her mother, Mrs. Gardner, upon guard. He borrows his taxi driver's coat and hat as a disguise, but before he can leave, Helen arrives home with two men members of her party, including the obnoxious count.

She says she has been dining at the Ritz in town, while his report has been directly to the contrary. The mother comes to his place of concealment to demand of him the truth, and in this conference they are surprised by Count Apponnetti and his friend Baron Rimini, who advance upon Lansing in a rage.

CHAPTER VIII.

VERY LIKE A TRAP.

LANSING'S eyes flashed angrily. He had been itching all evening for a chance to smite the unctuous countenance of Apponnetti, and now had not the slightest objection to mauling the shining features of the man called Baron Rimini, whom Lansing recognized as the person with whom he had had dealings just prior to the raid.

But as he could see no definite object to be gained by beginning the assault, he awaited any move the two men might make.

Having advanced half way to Lansing,

they paused and exchanged a few sentences in French, spoken so rapidly that the young man could not quite catch the drift. At all events Apponnetti turned to Mrs. Granger, who after her first outburst had stood watching them, breathing heavily.

"My dear Alice, my dear madam," he began, "I certainly wish to apologize most abjectly for my words which were so uttered as to cause you to misunderstand them. I had no idea that you—you were entertaining this man. That was purely metaphorical. But may I have the temerity to ask just what he is doing here?"

Without a glance at Lansing the woman replied in a voice filled with scorn.

"He came," she said, "to inform me that my daughter was detained upon Long Island, that there had been an accident to her car. He tells me he is a chauffeur. When you rang the bell he was afraid his employer would discharge him for coming here, and asked to be concealed. He was just leaving as you—"

She was interrupted at that point by a burst of hearty laughter, which came from both men after an interchange of significant glances.

"So," exclaimed the count, "he is a chauffeur and he came here to explain your daughter's delay. Ha! Ha! That is rich. And he has told you other things, no doubt."

"He has told me enough to make me believe you have all been deceiving me."

"Mother!" The cry of the girl, who, attracted by the voices, had entered from the dining-room, was filled with reproach. Apponnetti silenced her with a gesture.

"So," he laughed, "sits the wind in that quarter, eh! Well, what can we do better than to explain to your satisfaction that this man is a fugitive from justice, and—"

"You mustn't say that," interposed Helen. "Mother, he may have meant well, may have thought he had my interest at heart, may—as all chauffeurs do—may have been looking for a gratuity from you—"

But Apponnetti's liquid voice here bore in and took the lead away from her.

"The man is a rascal. Your daughter does not know whereof she speaks. I know all about him, and shall explain it all, if you allow me, to your satisfaction."

"You will!" flared Lansing. "Well, before you begin I should like an opportunity to say something to Mrs. Granger. When you call a man a rascal you give him the right to explain himself. And," his eyes glared at the two and then went over their shoulders to the thin, spare figure of Clarkin, who had remained to sample the cognac and was now entering the room, wiping his lips with his tongue, "and I intend to explain right now."

Apponnetti glanced at the baron, who nodded, whereat the count waved his hands gracefully.

"Anything you care to say in your defense we will cheerfully hear," he murmured, "and when you are done I crave you will grant us the indulgence of characterizing you further."

"Well," ejaculated Lansing, without a

glance at the count, "I wish to inform you, Mrs. Granger, that this girl is in the company of men who are suspected by the police of having a hand in traitorous plots. The room in which these people, your daughter included, were dining to-night was raided and I was the one who saved Miss Granger from arrest."

"From arrest!" Mrs. Granger's eyes traveled swiftly from Lansing to the other members of the group. "Will some one please tell me where I stand? I hear lie after lie, statement after statement, each one conflicting. Now—"

"Mother," Helen here broke in, "Mr.—this chauffeur says now the police came because my cousin and the rest were engaged in traitorous plots. He seems unable to speak the truth. In fact, he told me they were raided merely because of the reputation of the place."

"No matter what I told you," interjected Lansing, "what I say now is the truth."

"You mean to imply that Count Apponnetti, Mr. Clarkin, the Baron Rimini—"

Apponnetti stepped deliberately toward her and placed his hand over her mouth, smiling and moving his head derisively from side to side.

"My dear girl, will you please allow me to speak? I can tell you why our dinner party was ruined to-night—"

"But why did you have a dinner party on Long Island?" persisted Mrs. Granger.

"Yes, why?" added Lansing, who could plainly see he had made an impression upon the older woman, and that she was loath to believe he had been hoodwinking her.

Apponnetti was standing patiently, his eyes roving from Lansing to Mrs. Granger.

"That I intend to explain—and quite comprehensively, if you will but give me the opportunity," he said.

"Well?" Mrs. Granger seated herself in a chair nearby prepared to listen.

"Go on," growled Lansing, "I should be pleased to hear you, I'm sure."

"Would you?" Apponnetti lifted his eyebrows. "Then we are all of a mind. Well, then, this dinner party was in line with the business upon which your daughter has entered. As for silk mills on Long Island, I think we may go to a person better informed than this alleged chauffeur as to that. In any event, there are places on Long Island that appeal to wealthy silk manufacturers; many of them, especially in

this August weather. However, we will let that pass. Now then, if you don't mind, I shall give way to Baron Rimini, whose word as a man of honor is unchallenged. Baron, will you be so good as to speak?"

"With pleasure." The baron fingered his imperial, passed his hands over his shining forehead and then, without a glance at Mrs. Granger, but with a significant look at Lansing, began. "You must know, Mrs. Granger, that our dinner party was carefully selected as to company, and that your daughter was chaperoned by your cousin, the count."

Lansing laughed, as he pointed out that Apponnetti was not in the dining-room at all.

"He did speak to the party while they were waiting for their dinner, in the room down-stairs, but he did not go up," he added.

"The count had not yet joined us in the private room," Rimini went on calmly, "but this was only because he had a matter of business to attend to, as you shall soon see."

He cleared his throat and proceeded.

"Our dinner had not been long in progress when I happened to notice that in some manner our waiters had been changed. The servitor we had first was a genuine waiter, with ability quite marked. It is always my habit to scrutinize waiters, as the serving of a meal is quite one of the important elements thereof. As I say, I noticed that the waiter who served our oysters was not the man of whom we had ordered the dinner.

"At first it occurred to me that for some reason or other the management had seen fit to make the change, but another study of the new man revealed the fact that he was not a waiter at all. For although he had on a waiter's jacket and apron, he had not the regular waiter's shirt or collar, and I saw, too, that his vest, a tan one, was pushed back beneath the lapels of the jacket so as to conceal it.

"What was the inference, I ask you? Why, nothing but that curious work was going forward.

"Thereupon I rang up Count Apponnetti, who was in conference with a friend in the manager's office below, explaining to him the situation. He spoke to François—the proprietor of the restaurant—who recalled that a suspicious person had engaged the room adjoining ours. François and the

count and a guard of employees at once went up-stairs to investigate, while I took this waiter out in the hall to question him.

"He acted very strangely, declared we were all in danger and must escape at once.

"I confess I was amazed, not being familiar with this country, and suspected perhaps we were to be attacked by outlaws. I was the more worried because of groans I heard in the adjoining room.

"Well, we no sooner returned to the private dining room, I and the waiter, when he steals to the door, locks it and throws the key out of the window. The next instant we hear a battering at the door and the calling of loud, angry voices seeking admittance."

The baron laughed easily.

"I may say," he went on, "that I was tempted to open the door; in fact, I should have done so had the key not been missing—quite to my chagrin and dismay. Thereupon this waiter cried we were beset by ruffians and would be murdered. We were all of us overwrought, excited, and I, chancing to find by the radiator a rope ladder, provided by François, as a fire-escape, lowered it from the window, and the last one of us left the room by that means as the door was being battered down."

Lansing laughed in spite of his indignation.

"That is one fine story, baron. It is really a crackerjack! You ought to be writing books about life in a European court."

"Peace!" The baron's eyes were snapping. "This is not all. We will now allow the Count Apponnetti to relate further developments."

"Yes," and Apponnetti took the center of the floor. "When I received the baron's message by telephone—all the private rooms have house telephones—I, as he said, at once reported to François, who, calling his two house detectives, proceeded up-stairs to investigate. We went to the private room which this suspicious person had engaged—the room adjoining ours—and I ask you what did we find?"

"We found the original waiter lying upon the floor, bound and gagged, suffering from an unmerciful beating. We at once released him, and he told how he had been attacked by the young man who had engaged the room. The man had first attempted to bribe him to exchange clothes,

and when the honest fellow refused, he was beaten into insensibility, his clothing removed and donned by this man you see standing before you!"

"And so," continued Apponnetti, "François, wild with rage and fearing a plot to rob his patrons, ordered this spurious waiter seized. But we found the door of the private dining-room locked. François ordered it broken down and the fake waiter arrested. That—that—" Apponnetti's voice, which had fallen to a whisper, now rose thrillingly; "that was the reason the room was attacked—we were seeking to arrest this criminal, this ruffian, this interloper with his evil designs, this—"

Helen Granger's excited voice interrupted him. She advanced in front of Lansing, facing him with flashing eyes.

"So," she breathed, "that was the cause of all the trouble! Our room was attacked by those who were in pursuit of you—of you, a criminal, who had the hardihood to leave with me in your company, I suppose so as to give you countenance if we were captured."

Lansing could not take his eyes from the girl, with her burnished hair shining in the electric light, her wide gray eyes shooting shafts of light, her wonderful lithe figure drawn taut and tense so that every supple line was revealed; her slim, shining slipper, tapping the floor in her emotion.

So fascinated was the man that for a moment he did not realize that every one stood silent, waiting for him to speak. When he understood this, he opened his lips, but words did not come. A pretty strong story had been made out, he was obliged to confess.

"Aha! Guilt!" Rimini grimaced at him derisively.

"Silence, you dog," snarled Lansing. "I was just trying to digest this fairy tale you both have been getting off. I—"

"Fairy tale," cried Apponnetti, who obviously did not intend to give Lansing a chance to try to shatter the yarn that had been so cleverly fabricated. "Fairy tale! Let us see about that. As a matter of fact François has a warrant for your arrest. Rimini, would you oblige me by calling police headquarters and asking them to send a detective here?"

"Stop!" Lansing strode toward the baron, who was making toward the telephone. But Apponnetti's next words gave him pause.

"Of course," he sneered, "if you are afraid to have the detective come we are willing to defer action and let you leave quietly. We don't wish to cause a scene here in Mrs. Granger's home. You will be captured quickly enough anyway. Do you wish to go?"

Lansing saw the trap. He knew that were he to leave he would dissipate the last doubt which remained in the girl's mind as to his innocence—and yet he knew that were he to stay he would be arrested as sure as guns.

"May I speak, Mrs. Granger?" he asked at length. The woman did not glance at him, satisfied apparently that the stories told by Rimini and Apponnetti were quite true.

Apponnetti was quick to interpose.

"Why should we listen to him?" he said, appealing at large to the group. "If we are guilty then we are surely making a grievous mistake in summoning the police. On the other hand, if our charge against him is correct the detective can speedily establish this to your satisfaction, my dear madam."

"Ah," cried the baron, "why delay further? Shall I, or shall I not, summon the officer?"

Lansing compressed his lips. He knew he would be obliged to answer sooner or later the charge of assaulting the waiter and hoped to find Griscom and have him testify as to his reasons therefor.

"We might as well have this over with right now," he declared. "Go ahead and send for your—"

As he was speaking the baron unobserved had stolen to the telephone and had given a number, which Lansing did not catch. He did not know the headquarters call, but he did know that it was in the Spring Street zone. Whether or not the baron had called properly he did not know. In fact for the moment it did not occur to him that the foreigner had any intention other than summoning the police.

"Will you please send a man here at once," he heard Rimini saying, with preliminary words. "We have some one for you to deal with."

"Now," and Apponnetti rubbed his hands, "we shall see what we shall see. I beg of you Mr. Chauffeur, to be seated quietly until the officer arrives."

"But why," asked Mrs. Granger, who had been sitting in deep thought, clasping and unclasping her hands, "did you tell me,

Helen, that you had dined at the Ritz, that you were not on Long Island?"

"I did not say I was not on Long Island, mother," replied Helen quickly. "I merely said we had dined at the Ritz, which is true. The count and these men met me in this city when I returned from François's place and we went to the Ritz to finish our interrupted meal."

"But you said nothing about Long Island and François, as you call him," protested Mrs. Granger.

"Now, mother," and Helen went over and kissed her, "you are so foolish about my motoring. Had I told you I was going down on Long Island you would at once have been alarmed, and if I am to succeed in what I am doing, you must not worry or mistrust me. I hold your honor and mine in the highest regard—"

"Certainly," murmured Apponnetti.

"And," went on the girl, "believe me, I shall never do anything that will cause you to blush. I may"—she smiled and kissed her mother again—"I may of course do things that will strike you as unconventional, but—you must let me judge, trusting me always. Will you, mother dear?"

Mrs. Granger smiled and patted her daughter's cheek.

"We are old women, I suppose," she murmured fondly. "Girls did not act so when I was young—"

"New times, new manners," interposed the baron.

"I suppose so," smiled Mrs. Granger. "Well, at all events it is ended now, and as soon as we get rid of this—man," nodding toward Lansing, "I hope we can settle down to more humdrum affairs. Only," she added, with sudden thought, "why—why do you suppose he came to me with this story?"

"There is no saying," Apponnetti answered. "Perhaps when the detective arrives he will be so good as to explain to us this last phase of his evening's activities."

Lansing, busy with his own thoughts, had hardly heard the talk that was going on about him. Now he looked up and asked:

"Would you mind if I used your telephone?"

"I certainly should," returned Apponnetti. "I think you had best leave such matters to the judgment of the officer."

Thus vanished Lansing's idea of calling up François and squaring the obnoxious little affair with the waiter.

Hardly ten minutes had passed when a

step was heard outside, and a second later the bell rang. Every one stood up. The count walked swiftly to the door, opened it, and Lansing heard a murmur of voices preceding the entrance behind Apponnetti of two of the most ill-favored men it had ever been his misfortune to behold.

City detectives! They had about as much right to be so regarded as being risen direct from the uttermost limbo of the infernal regions. Lansing knew the square-toed, broad-shouldered breed of Central Office huskies. These newcomers suggested nothing so much as Apaches from the vilest penetralia of the Montmartre in Paris.

Lansing glanced toward the door and shivered involuntarily. Then he squared his shoulders.

CHAPTER IX.

MANY THINGS HAPPEN.

THE two ill-favored fellows stood surveying Lansing, who was by no means to be despised either in size or build. The latter now turned to Mrs. Granger.

"Those men are not detectives," he said. "I want you to understand I shall not be taken away by them."

"Aha! Guilt!" Apponnetti's voice had an evil twang. "Guilt! Seize him, men; take him off to the police-station, where he may answer for his crimes."

"I shan't be taken by them," growled Lansing, the fervor of combat gripping him, despite the odds. And he had no doubt that the dark-jowled pair were armed, as he had reason to know Baron Rimini was.

"You will be taken by them," Rimini's voice snapped. "Arrest him, you fellows. Why this delay?"

Lansing leaned forward and seized the reading table, which was within his reach. This he pulled over the polished hardwood floor until he had it in front of him, where he stood in a little alcove where the windows were.

He did this so quickly that he was established in his position before a move could be made to restrain him. The table had moved as though on greased rollers, piling up a rug as it went.

Then he seized by the head and neck a bronze statue of the Discobolus, which was standing upon the table. It was about two feet high, and its heavy metal pedestal made it an excellent weapon.

"Get out of here, both of you," he cried. Apponnetti's hand stifled Mrs. Granger's scream, and she allowed herself to be pushed toward the dining-room and into it, her daughter following, turning back a horrified glance over her shoulder.

Lansing's assailants, taken by surprise and viewing Lansing's fortified position, had paused, deliberating. Rimini advanced with a revolver to the edge of the table and thrust it as close to Lansing as he dared, keeping in mind the poised weapon which the besieged one held in his hands.

"Come out or I'll shoot," warned the baron.

Lansing laughed at him.

"Why don't you shoot then?" he jeered. "Why? Because you don't dare. You want to do your murdering in the quiet places. Here you might get caught at it. Shoot any time you like."

Apponnetti, hovering in the background, moved to the dining-room door and closed it.

Rimini beckoned to Clarkin and pointed to one side of the table, to which one of the pair of brutes moved. The other remained at the center and Rimini took the other flank. Then, with concerted movement, the table was pushed inward in an attempt to pin Lansing against the window casement.

But the Discobolus descended with crashing force, narrowly missing one of the hands which was withdrawn in the nick of time. But a great piece was gouged out of the table.

Thereupon one of the assailants picked up a small onyx clock and hurled it at Lansing's head. He saw it in time to dodge and the missile went beyond him, shattering the glass of the window and falling to the street below.

Lansing then released one hand from the statue, reached down and seized a metal card receiver. It left his hand with the speed of a baseball, and Lansing had the satisfaction of seeing it land fair on the luminous brow of Rimini, who slumped over backward to land on the floor, where he lay still.

The room was immediately filled with cries of rage. One of the husky pair, leaping forward, clutched Lansing by the breast of his shirt, just as Lansing delivered a blow on the fellow's shoulder. It was a fearful blow, and the man fairly screamed with pain, his hand at the same time falling from

Lansing's breast with the entire front part of the silken garment in its fingers. Lansing had just time to aim another blow at the sprawling form when he caught a flash of steel and saw the man's side-partner diving forward, knife in hand.

With lightning-like alteration of aim, Lansing caught the descending hand a glancing stroke and sent the knife flying into a corner of the room.

The attacking force now retreated, the man with injured shoulder swinging it around his head, as though to restore feeling, cursing the while in French. The other, whose hand had been struck, was fingering it, as though searching for broken bones.

At this point the dining-room door flew open and Helen Granger stepped out.

"I shall not permit this any longer. There will be a murder here. I command you to let this man go."

"You do not know what you are saying," cried Apponnetti. "These men are officers of the law and this fellow is resisting arrest. The affair is out of my hands."

He nodded to one of the ill-favored pair, who immediately stepped up to the girl and laid his hand upon her arm, as though to lead her back to the dining-room.

She threw his hand aside and faced Lansing.

"Will you submit to be arrested if these men lay aside their weapons and promise not to hurt you?"

Lansing's face was set in a scowl. He was seeing red.

"I'll do nothing of the sort. These men are not police. Do you not know what an American detective looks like? These men are murderers, thugs. You low damn scoundrels, I'll show you what it means to do me up."

With a short sharp cry he pushed the table from in front of him and leaped out whirling and brandishing the bronze statue like a maddened Dervish. He had no idea of escape now. He was filled with no thought but that of wiping this band of cutthroats off the earth.

Before his assailants could recover from their astonishment he was upon them, the very epitome of lithe, hard-hitting, venomous fury. His first blow sent one of the hulking creatures to the floor like an ox. Apponnetti, who seized a poker from the fireplace, struck wildly, the brazen implement glancing off Lansing's cheekbone, inflicting a cut, which, however, was not suf-

ficiently deep to stun him. It served merely to enhance his rage.

His counter-stroke would have killed the man had it landed, as aimed, upon Apponetti's head. But Lansing was pushed forward as he struck and the statue lodged in the pit of the count's stomach, sending him so promptly to the land of dreams that it is possible the man never knew what hit him. At all events he draped himself picturesquely across the recumbent body of his compatriot, Rimini.

Lansing now felt a blunt instrument descend upon his neck and knew from the warm trickle under his collar that blood had been drawn. But his fighting spirit was not affected. One of the men gripped his shoulder with a pair of huge paws and Lansing, using his statue as a battering ram, sent him reeling away. But he came back, cursing. A knife whizzed under Lansing's nose and took a strip out of his collar.

At close quarters he knew he was bound to succumb at any moment. He realized that he must put distance between himself and his three antagonists. So he backed away, swinging fiercely at any one of the trio who dared approach within the circle of his sweep.

As he neared the table again he stumbled and reeled over the end of a rug. To regain his balance he was obliged to present his back to the foe, and an exulting cry showed that his opponents appreciated the advantage which the accident had given them.

Lansing's brain worked swiftly. If he turned he would be at the mercy of the men. He had nothing to do but to stumble on. He cleared the table by a dive—as close a reproduction of one of his old diving tackles against a Princeton runner as could be imagined. This brought his fingers against the window casement. With his Discobolus he smashed out the glass that remained and plunged through to the fire-escape beyond. When his pursuers reached the window he was already on his way down the ladder, sending upward a mocking laugh.

In another few seconds he had landed in a side street. Running around to the front of the apartment he was rejoiced to find his faithful Jehu still on watch, the motor panting beneath him. He climbed in and settled languidly back upon the seat.

"Home, driver," he murmured.

As the cab jolted over the pavement

Lansing found himself settled in a strange lethargy, as though nerves and muscles and brain had utterly relaxed, as indeed they had. His one thought was of his apartment, a hot and cold bath and bed.

The night watchman and elevator boy greeted his appearance with surprise and sympathy, thinking he had joined some of the young bloods of the city who delight in making trouble for all-night restaurant keepers, and that he had emerged the worse for his experience.

Lansing answered them briefly and hurried to his rooms. His man was waiting for him and being well trained, gave vent to no expression of surprise or concern regarding his master's disheveled condition.

"Scotty," said Lansing, with a faint smile, "your former master, Lord Ainsmith, was a patron of the prize ring, wasn't he?"

"He was, sur," burred the man. "He was very fond o' th' fawncy, sur."

"Yes," nodded Lansing. "Well, as you see, Scotty, I've been milling a bit myself to-night. Do you know what'll make this cheekbone look respectable—and by the bye, have a peep at my neck here, will you?"

The man inspected his master, clucking his sympathy.

"My word, but they were fairish clips, sur. Were they not brass knuckles? A fist don't make no such wound on a throat."

"Brass something," replied Lansing. "Get my bath ready, hot fresh soup, and you might see if you can't think up some way of improving my appearance to-morrow."

"I've got some bottles of Elliman I brought from the old country," the man returned. "I've found it very good, sur."

"Good enough." Lansing began to remove the remains of his blood-stained shirt. "I'm in your hands, Scotty. Oh, say, I am not in to any one, provided there should be a call on the phone."

"Very good, sur." The servant hurried into the bath-room, and then went on to his own room, whence he issued shortly bearing bottles of liniment and salve.

Lansing found several bruises upon his body, but was pleased to discover that the cut on his neck, while painful, was not to be regarded as dangerous in its results, and that the abrasion on his cheek was serious only as it disfigured him. He had emerged from football contests in far worse condition.

When he finally retired his nervous system had resumed its wonted order and his body, bathed and massaged by the skilful servant, glowed comfortably. When he awoke about eight o'clock from a dreamless slumber he was tempted to spring from bed, but recalling that the day was Sunday, sank back and slept another hour, when he was awakened by a movement in his room.

"Well, Scotty," he said sleepily, "you're a good trainer. I feel perfectly fit. Let's see, what engagements did I have to-day?"

The man named several and then announced that a visitor was down-stairs.

"A visitor!" exclaimed Lansing. "Who—what is his name, do you know?"

"The telephone operator, sur, said it was Griscom," was the reply.

"I see." Lansing thought a moment. "Scotty, telephone that I am just about to breakfast. Ask him if he has breakfasted, and if not, does he care to join me?"

Scotty obeyed the order and was informed that the man below had not breakfasted and would be glad to accept the invitation. Lansing thereupon gave the order for the meal to be sent up from the restaurant below and hurried to the shower.

When Griscom was ushered into the apartment Lansing received him in a dressing-gown, giving every appearance, save for the bruised cheek, of a young man who had retired the previous night after an uneventful evening of social pleasure.

"I am glad you remember me," said the detective, after Lansing's cordial greeting.

"It was not a serious tax upon my mind," smiled Lansing, "since, as you will recall, it was only yesterday we met."

"That's true." The visitor's steel gray eyes swept around the apartment and then the gaunt, grim-lined face turned to the young man. "Your motor-car is in front of the apartment. I drove it around this morning."

Lansing glanced at him and nodded.

"I certainly am obliged to you, Mr. Griscom," he said, "for I was rather worried about the Gray Goose. She does about seventy miles when she's feeling healthy, and is about the only car I know whose light body can take care of the vibrations of the powerful motor. Most of those cars are deuced uncomfortable riding."

"Yes," agreed the detective, his eyes fixed curiously upon Lansing. "I can testify to the excellence of your vehicle. I had quite a ride in it last night."

"So you were one of the chaps who stole my car and went joy riding while I was dining at François's!" Lansing noted a significant wrinkling about the lean, if square jaws of the man and changed his trend abruptly.

"Mr. Griscom," he went on, "I know you have a lot to talk to me about; I've a few things to say myself. Let us have a comfortable breakfast in the dining-room, where, over a cigar or two that I think you may enjoy, we'll thresh out anything you have to propose."

The two men were soon at a comfortable table facing each other. Lansing, as will be recalled, had eaten no dinner the previous night and now was ravenously hungry, while the government agent, who, also, apparently, had forgotten to dine, was hardly less eager.

Presently, having dipped his fingers in the little brass bowl at his side, and lighted a cigar, Lansing leaned back, raising his eyebrows inquiringly at the secret service man, who was already puffing with loving care upon one of Lansing's long, dark brevas.

"Shoot," grinned Lansing.

The detective leaned across the table.

"Last evening, Mr. Lansing," he began, "you raised hell with us. What did you do it for, would you mind telling me?"

Lansing thought a moment before replying.

"In the first place, Mr. Griscom," he replied at length, "I wish before answering you to get some idea of my status in your eyes." Yesterday the attitude you maintained at the Army and Navy Club led me to believe that you thought I was mixed up in a crowd of spies. I should like, if you don't mind, to get your precise conception of me."

Griscom nodded as though that was a fair enough question, and, in his turn, wrinkled his brows thoughtfully, the while blowing clouds of blue smoke toward the ceiling.

"Naturally," he proceeded, "I looked you up pretty carefully once my suspicions, as you put it, were aroused concerning you. I don't want to appear overly foolish in your eyes, but you will understand that in my business we can afford to neglect no details of any sort. There was one time when we had an assistant cabinet officer under observation, a perfectly straight man as we found."

"Oh, I understand," responded Lansing. "That was perfectly all right. I am glad you looked me up. I guess I had a fairly clean bill of health, didn't I?"

"Absolutely," replied the detective. "But now to get down to particulars: you were at François's place last evening. You, or some of the party you were in, did up a waiter and assumed his clothes—something, by the way, I had in mind to do myself—and then when we tried to break into the place you all beat it out of the window. You were seen leaving with that red-headed girl."

"I was seen leaving!" exclaimed Lansing.

"I saw you myself," retorted Griscom. "Now, you are doing a foolish thing, assuming you are not mixed up in what this bunch is trying to put over. You were interfering with government processes and, believe me, that's a pretty dangerous thing for a young man, however adventurous, to tamper with."

Lansing decided to be frank.

"I know nothing about the activities of this crowd, but I'll say they look like a slimy set. But there's one thing: you've got that girl wrong. She is innocent—that I firmly believe."

"Do you know anything about her, that makes you willing to say that?" asked Griscom.

"No, I judge her only by what I have seen of her. She is mixed up with that crowd, but I doubt very much if she realizes what she is doing."

Griscom laughed.

"And so you decided *not* to give her the chance to prove to us that what you believe is actually the case. Isn't that taking a person pretty much on trust? You know if she could convince us there would not be the slightest trouble for her, so far as we are concerned. What happened was that when we thought we had the proper evidence, you spoiled our plans by making off with one of the persons we were after; not the principal one by any means, but just the same one of them."

"I was trying to save her reputation, to save her being arrested and publicly exploited," explained Lansing. "As for the rest, I did nothing to save them. Why were they not caught?"

"They had a motor-boat in the creek which runs back of François's place. They went in this to Allendale and entered their car there. We did not think of that; we

thought their automobile was in the garage. As Allendale is nearer New York than that restaurant they beat us in by a good margin."

"But suppose you had captured the girl?" queried Lansing. "You say she is not the principal."

"We'd have got the main people once we laid hands on her," was the answer. "We were not ready to make a move on that bunch until last evening, and now—well, any papers they may have had have been destroyed and a witness against them, a soldier at Fort Hamilton whom we were holding in Castle William under arrest, escaped last night along with a trusty. That means we have weeks more of work ahead of us; and if the gang have got what they wanted and stop their activities then we are dished for good. Thanks to you, Lansing."

"I'm sorry," Lansing declared earnestly.

"We had them working under our eyes all along, never suspecting they were being watched," grumbled Griscom. "Now they'll scatter like a flock of quail, and probably delegate their further designs to a new crowd."

Lansing's heart beat swiftly. In this event the girl was in no further danger, and he could proceed at his leisure to establish the impression, which persisted, despite his recurrent efforts to dismiss it, that she was an innocent dupe in the hands of Count Apponnetti and the rest.

"By the way," he said, "this chap Apponnetti ought to be easy to get hold of; he's a regular rounder, isn't he?"

Griscom glanced quickly at Lansing at mention of the name, then affected a lazy attitude as he answered:

"Apponnetti, the count, you mean? Why, he's all right. That is, he is loyal enough. What he is after is the girl."

Lansing's face burned and he rose to his feet.

"Griscom," he blazed out, "pardon me, but of all blundering. Why, Count Apponnetti is her—"

Griscom glanced upward at his host.

"Yes," he smiled, "he is her—what?"

Lansing threw himself disgustedly down in his chair again.

"You make me sick, Griscom. That snake is no more—"

"You were going to say that Apponnetti was something to her," interrupted Griscom. "Now would you mind telling me what you had in mind?"

"Why, her—friend," rejoined Lansing.

"All right; then you are intimating nothing more nor less than I intimated," grinned the detective.

"Oh!" Lansing writhed inwardly, not caring to betray too great familiarity with the girl's affairs, lest the detective suspect him of being mixed up with the nefarious plots of Rimini and the rest. "She is a decent, pure-minded girl, perhaps misled by her companions, I'll admit, but—as for Apponnetti—pshaw!"

"What you were about to say was that Apponnetti is a distant relative of Miss Granger's," remarked Griscom in a soft voice.

He arose in his turn. "I noticed a waiter's jacket hanging in the hallway," he added. "Would you very much mind if I got it and went through the pockets?"

"Not at all," Lansing said easily. "I'll have Scotty, my man, bring it in."

Nevertheless, the knowledge betrayed by the detective had dazed him.

"Never mind," replied the detective, "I know just where it is; I'll get it myself."

Returning with the jacket, Griscom ran his hands into the various pockets, and then up and down the back, he nodded and turning the garment inside out pulled open a flap. Into this his hand disappeared and came out the next instant with a sheet of parchment folded twice. This he opened, glanced at the lettering, and then, holding it in his left hand, continued his search of the garment.

At length he glanced at Lansing.

"Where's the rest?" he asked.

"The rest! The rest what?" Lansing, recalling now the paper he had seen Apponnetti take out of the jacket the previous evening while seated in his motor-car, was strangely moved.

"The rest of this." Griscom passed him the parchment, evidently a covering for a manuscript of some sort, and Lansing, taking it, gazed at the lettering. It read:

"Proposed Defenses for Easterly Sector of District of Greater New York."

CHAPTER X.

NEW YORK TO NEWPORT.

LANSING gravely handed the sheet back to the detective and smiled scornfully.

"So," he said, "all this conversation was cleverly designed to lead me up to a certain

point. Well, I've been led. I suppose I'm to consider that I am suspect."

"You are not to consider anything except the project of handing me the remainder of those papers—or telling me where they are," replied Griscom quietly.

As Lansing hesitated, deliberating whether or not to make a clean breast of the whole affair, Griscom spoke again.

"And you might tell me what sort of an evening you had with Miss Granger last night. Rather a rough one I should gather," with a nod toward Lansing's scarred cheek.

Lansing went back to the table and took a chair.

"Sit down, will you, please?" he said to Griscom. "I see no special reason why I should any longer appeal to you as a traitor to a country in whose defense I'm quite willing to fight."

Thereupon he proceeded to relate the events of the last twenty-four hours, beginning with the poker automobile game in Nealis's car, his first view of Miss Granger, his meeting her on the avenue and following her to Long Island, his overhearing of Griscom's talk in the telephone booth, his attack upon the waiter, the flight from the room, the night motor-race, the talk with the mother and the thrilling fight which preceded his escape.

Griscom listened, transfixed.

"And you say Apponnetti took some papers out of that waiter's coat before he passed it back to you?" he asked.

"Yes," returned Lansing, "and that is how I first came to believe that he was mixed up with the operations of that crowd."

"That's a new one, Apponnetti," mused Griscom, "I didn't suppose he had the nerve. Yet, on the other hand, he has been in need of money."

"Is there, then, enough money in this game to make it worth the risk that a fellow like Apponnetti and the rest are taking?" inquired Lansing.

"Why, yes." Griscom raised his brows. "What chance do they run when we are not at war? Imprisonment—yes, but look at what they stand to earn."

"They can earn big money, then?"

Griscom waved his hands.

"They can ask almost any price they want for the plans of which this parchment was one of the covers. The new system of concealed guns; the various salients; the caliber and the general location are inval-

able to certain governments. Now, Lansing, you did us out of them last night. It is up to you to help us get them back."

"Why don't you seize Apponnetti and this mucker Rimini, and the rest—excepting the girl?" asked Lansing.

"What could we prove?" grimaced Griscom. "As I told you, our witness in Castle Williams—the man who stole the plans in the first instance—is gone. It would not be so bad, but he dealt with parties whose names he did not know. What we intended to do was to get the party with the goods on and then have Private Kranich confront them."

"What was the idea of their meeting down at François's last night?" Lansing wanted to know.

"Because they supposed it to be an out-of-the-way place. They suspected they were watched, and didn't mind much until the time came to turn the papers over to the accredited agent sent for them, Baron Rimini. Had they not had the papers in their possession last night they never would have run away as they did."

"May I ask how you knew they had the papers last night?" Lansing inquired.

"You may ask, but I'm sorry I am not at liberty to tell you." Griscom shrugged his shoulders apologetically. "It was one of those curious cases where we knew all about who had the plans for hours before an attempt was made to deliver them. But we could not lay hands upon the parties until just before the dinner party started, and then we decided to clean up the whole gang with the raid. And you—"

"I know," sighed Lansing, "I messed up the whole thing. Well, is there anything I can do to atone?"

"There is." Griscom spoke decidedly. "There is a lot you can do, and I think I have the right to insist that you do it. For one thing you can locate Miss Granger for us, get yourself on a friendly footing and—"

"You want me to spy upon her!" blazed Lansing.

"I want you to keep her straight, if you can; if she doesn't keep straight, I want you to keep us advised. It is up to her; if she is worthy of your confidence you will have no disagreeable duty to perform. If she isn't you ought to be patriotic enough not to hesitate to help us in the interest of the government."

Griscom paused.

"I may advise you," he resumed "that your share in last night's proceedings was not altogether well advised, and that despite your position in society and the prominence of your father, we could make more trouble for you than you might care for."

"I suppose you are right," agreed Lansing ruefully.

"Well, then, help us out. I have an idea you know where that girl is and that you'll be with her soon. It's one of those affairs you know, where both are interested at first sight. As a matter of fact, there may be nothing for you to do. I may as well inform you, too, that your activities at the Granger flat last night helped us a lot. The noise of the fight was heard in various apartments and the police were summoned. Apponnetti tried to explain that the noise was a family row, but the police insisted upon entering the apartment and found Rimini still dozing from that dent in the forehead you gave him. Mrs. Granger and Apponnetti squared things somehow, so that no arrests were made, but Rimini had to go to the hospital—there was nothing to it—"

"He will not die!" cried Lansing.

"He won't, no thanks to you," laughed Griscom. "Well, anyway, Apponnetti kept trying to get something from Rimini's pockets while they waited for the ambulance, but the cop wouldn't let him near."

"Yes?"

"And so Rimini was taken to the hospital and the plans with him. He's there now—pretty sick, and the plans—" Griscom took a package from his pocket—"the plans are here—all except the first two sheets."

"I see." Lansing's face, however, was puzzled in its expression. "But how did you suspect the two missing sheets might be in that waiter's jacket?"

"That," replied Griscom, "opens up a new service you did for us. That waiter was a spy we had been after for months. When you knocked him out and roped him you did us a great turn. If you had prevented Apponnetti from abstracting the papers he has you would have done us still better."

"Then," cried Lansing, smiling in relief, "I am not going to get in trouble with the police for manhandling that waiter?"

"Not you," Griscom asserted. "We have him under lock and key. You did a mighty good job there."

"Well," Lansing leaned forward, to touch the secret service man upon the arm. "Now if you will catch Clarkin and Apponnetti I think that will be about all."

As Griscom smiled Lansing increased the pressure of his fingers upon the man's arm.

"Can't you see, man, that girl is a dupe—a dupe, I tell you. She doesn't realize the mess she is in. I like her; hang it, the more I try to get her out of my mind and set her down as an adventuress, the more every fiber of me objects. Give her a chance, will you? Give me a chance."

"Look here," and Griscom smiled tolerantly. "We have Rimini; we have Krakoff—he's the waiter—and, between you and me, we don't want Apponnetti just now, because through him we have got in touch with a lot of these espionage people. Later he may lead us to more of them. So with the girl; she's involved all right, but you will have your chance to reform her. As a matter of fact the harbor defense steal is all settled, and it may be that ends the activities of this bunch. If so, all the better for the girl. But Apponnetti's got to answer for what he's done, whether he ever lifts a finger again or not."

"And Clarkin?" Lansing grinned. "You overlooked one man."

"Did we?" Griscom laughed in his peculiar noiseless manner. "Clarkin, eh!"

"Yes, Clarkin," persisted Lansing, puzzled at the man's manner. "Who is he?"

"Why, Clarkin," the detective said softly, "happens to be one of the ablest detectives in the employ of the United States secret service."

Lansing sank back weakly, throwing up his hands, murmuring only that Clarkin struck him as being the liveliest person out the window when the raid came, to which Griscom replied, that detectives have to be careful always to maintain appearances, and that those of the guild who looked only to the present and not to the future never got very far in their profession.

"When you stole that waiter's coat with the papers in it," added the detective, "you gummed up Clarkin's best laid plans, which is perhaps the reason why he tried to take a crack at you last night."

"Now I recall," laughed Lansing, "he seemed pretty much of a spectator; kept in the background."

"An interested spectator, I'll warrant," agreed Griscom. "He said it was the dandiest scrap he had ever attended."

"I suppose," murmured Lansing dejectedly, "that I've queered myself with Mrs. Granger and her daughter."

"No, you haven't," retorted the detective. "You have been made a member of the government secret service with orders to keep the fair lady out of trouble. We don't wish her to get into this mess, because her father was a distinguished officer, and her grandfather before her. We don't wish to blacken the name, and we believe with you she is a dupe."

"Good!" cried Lansing.

"Now," went on the detective, "we satisfied Mrs. Granger that you came to her in good faith last night. We informed her, in the presence of Apponnetti—you should have seen the old rascal beam with delight—that those men whom he had picked up with were really confidence men, that they had fooled Apponnetti into believing they were merchants. She believes now that those two thugs who played the part of detectives were strong arm men in the employ of Apponnetti's friends. Apponnetti agreed with everything we said, no doubt thinking in his heart we were the greatest fools that ever breathed. So you have a clean bill of health—you now pose as the much injured young man."

"And the girl?" breathed Lansing.

"I don't know what she thinks, honestly," replied Griscom. "She knew, of course, we were lying to her mother—just as Apponnetti thought we were deluded thick-heads, filled with nothing but theories. She's brighter than the count. Anyway she joined in with us in clearing your character—which leads me to the belief," and Griscom winked, "that you have made an impression."

Lansing started up.

"Well, in that case," he said blithely, "I think I shall pay my respects at the earliest moment. Do you know, Griscom," he added impulsively, "that when I looked forward to this day without the prospect of seeing that girl all my interest in life went out."

The detective regarded him queerly.

"Well, I don't think you'll see her to-day, nor her mother, nor the count."

"Why not?"

"Because I wanted to see her myself about an hour ago—just before I came here, and the three had disappeared."

"Where?" cried Lansing.

"I don't know where," was the reply.

"But I can tell you this: their getaway indicates one of two things—either that the mother has insisted upon their leaving this place of turmoil for quiet parts, or Apponnetti has not yet finished with his deviltry. One thing in favor of the last assumption is that the old fool doesn't appear to have the slightest idea that we connect him up with what has been going on. But if he has another scheme under way and drags that girl in—" Griscom paused impressively. "Apponnetti is gone now; he's cooked, but—well, if you are able to do it you will save your lady friend a lot of trouble by prying her loose from her distinguished cousin and keeping her loose. For the next time she mixes in, I warn you, she is going to a place where she won't have to worry how she dresses her hair."

"Well, where is she?" asked Lansing. "I'm willing to do my part."

"Do it, then," replied the detective, not answering the question. "Now I must go. I only request you for your own good to advise me next time you contemplate busting-up dinner parties."

He glided quietly out of the room and the hall door closed behind him.

"Well!" Lansing lighted a fresh cigar. "That's a queer sort of a bird. Confidential at times; at other times the reverse. He seems to think I can find that girl without turning a hair. . . . Well, not just now, thanks. I'm going to get Jim Nealis and I'm going to make him go to Newport with me. For I—I need a rest and a change of scene."

In the meantime it will be of interest to follow Griscom's movements for the first hour after leaving Lansing's apartments.

First he went to a hotel and got shaved. Then he waited about the lobby of the hostelry until three men entered. He joined the group and the four men went up-stairs to a private room.

"I saw Lansing," said Griscom as soon as they were seated and had lighted the inevitable cigars. "I admit I don't quite know what to make of him. I don't think he's in cahoots with No. 31745."

"If he is, he is pretty slick," commented another.

"What do you think, Clarkin?" and Griscom turned to the man who had witnessed the exciting events in the Granger apartment.

"I don't think Lansing is in this thing

for money, of course," answered Clarkin; "but, as you know, money isn't the only inducement. That girl has got him wound around her finger."

"All of which shows what rotten detectives you all are," scoffed Griscom. "Lansing is as innocent as you or I of any hand in this plot. He's merely a victim of love at first sight—and as for No. 31745—she's just a plain little fool."

"All right," replied Clarkin, flushing. "The Grangers have lit out, we don't know where—"

"Thanks to you," rejoined Griscom. "You were depended on to watch them and—"

"I hadn't slept for twenty-four hours," rejoined the man. "But I'll tell you—you believe in this chap Lansing: set one of the boys to shadow him, and if he doesn't take him to No. 31745 within twenty-four hours I'll buy you a new hat, Griscom."

"You're on," snapped Griscom. "Allison, shadow Lansing from now on, will you, and report what happens to me, care of this hotel."

Griscom winked at Clarkin and remarked that if there was nothing new to offer he would go up to the hospital and see if Rimini was in condition to listen to conversation. And in this manner the conference broke up.

Allison got around to Lansing's apartment in time to see that young man leave in his racing car, and was close enough to hear him grumble over the missing rear mudguard which had sideswiped the touring car on the narrow Long Island road the previous evening when Griscom was at the wheel.

Allison caught a taxi and followed him over to Fifth avenue and sat in it waiting while Lansing stepped out of his motor and ran up the steps of James Nealis's home.

Nealis was in the breakfast room, mulling over the Sunday newspapers when Lansing entered preceded by the butler. He glowered upon the newcomer.

"Well, Stew, what is your lie?" was his greeting. "It'll have to be a pretty good one, old top, because you hung me up to the queen's taste last night at the club."

Lansing sat down with a laugh.

"When you've heard all, Jim, you'll go down on your knees to me. I've been having adventures."

Whereupon he related the events of the day, following his parting with Nealis in

the morning and including the recent visit of Griscom to his apartment.

Nealis listened with amazement depicted upon his cherubic face and seemed to regard the story as fair compensation for his disappointment of the previous evening.

"Now," concluded Lansing, "I need a rest. I'm through with Miss Granger until I get my bearings. I feel a bit weak and run down. What do you say to running up to your folks at Newport for a week or so? Can they stand us?"

"They can," asserted Nealis. "Do you know the city has become unbearable to me, too; every one's away. Let's go now."

"The sooner the better," agreed Lansing. "But why not take the midnight?"

"Why not motor?" asked Nealis.

"All right; your car," chimed in Lansing. "If we start in the next hour we can make New London by night. Are you on?"

For reply Nealis rose and called his chauffeur upon the telephone, while Lansing took his place when he was through and ordered Scotty to pack the proper assortment of clothes.

Nealis sent Giles up-town in the touring car to get Lansing's stuff and Allison pursued him in the taxi. When Scotty had brought the small trunk down and the two men had stowed it on the rear rack Giles hopped into his seat and Lansing's man returned to the house pondering how to spend the brief respite afforded by his master's absence.

Allison, the detective, leaped from his cab and ran excitedly up to Giles.

"Driver," he addressed the chauffeur, "I have a message for Mr. Lansing. Do you know where he is?"

"He's down at Mr. Nealis's," replied the faithful driver.

"Oh, well—" the detective hesitated, "I sha'n't bother him yet a while then. Any time will do. I suppose I can see him here this afternoon?"

The thick-witted chauffeur smiled and shook his head.

"No siree," he said. "We are leaving for Newport as soon as I can get down to the house."

"Oh," Allison turned away and Giles started the car. As it rolled away Allison hurried to his driver.

"Man," he said, "can you do long distance work?"

"From here to Chicago's my limit," replied the driver.

"Well, and have you gasoline for, say, from here to Newport?" As the driver said that would be all right, Allison leaped into the cab and handed the man a bank note of impressive denomination. "Stick to that touring car, and never let it lose you," he ordered.

Lansing and Nealis started out from the house in high spirits, and in an hour were rolling along the broad highways of Westchester, engrossed in their game of automobile poker, and exchanging money as the fortunes of the game inclined. . . . And behind them always in the distance toiled a homely gray and black taxicab, dropping back on the straight road and catching up on the long turns. For, as the Jehu observed to Allison, his boat had a kick in her that would get right out of the car and waltz along the road by herself if he'd let her. Whether exaggerated or not, the detective came to have an immense regard for the vehicle he had snapped up.

New London was reached without accident about nine o'clock in the evening, and Nealis and Lansing put up at the Mohican. Allison did the same, leaving a call for the hour named by the young men he was trailing. Then, as he fancied Lansing had observed his cab suspiciously several times after leaving New Haven, he dismissed his vehicle and engaged a less conspicuous touring car from a local garage.

Nealis and Lansing had a leisurely breakfast, and as the detective's time was dependent on them, he also ate with deliberation.

About ten o'clock the pair started through the pleasant land leading over the river to Groton, and thence through Stonington, Westerly and Kingston, on through Narragansett Pier to the ferry to Jamestown, where Allison was obliged, of course, to travel upon the same ferryboat, his car being placed directly in the rear of Nealis's automobile.

As all familiar with this region are aware, the ferry, before reaching Jamestown, which is opposite Newport, passes the strong fortification, Fort Preble, which hides among the gray crags of Beaver Tail. As the boat lumbered past the disappearing gun emplacements a mahogany motor-boat suddenly shot out from a break in the seawall and directed a course toward Whale Rock lighthouse, which marks the extremity of Jamestown.

As the boat came close to the ferry-boat

Lansing suddenly leaned forward and nudged his companion.

"By Jove!" he gasped. "See that girl down there in the slicker? That's Miss Granger for a million dollars!"

"Yes," replied Nealis composedly. "She's bound around Whale Rock for Newport—and, Lansing," he added, "things don't look very good for that young lady, in spite of your belief."

Lansing sat back, a prey to mixed emotions, his eyes fastened upon the motor-boat until it disappeared.

"There was an army officer in there with her," he murmured.

"Worse and more of it," remarked Nealis sententiously.

Allison, who had seen the girl and noted the interest of the two young men, walked back to his vehicle with burning eyes, a smile of triumph upon his dark face.

When at length he had followed the pair to the Nealis summer home and had a bit of time at his disposal he placed his car in a garage and sauntered down to the Western Union telegraph office, and dashed off a despatch to Griscorn, his chief. Having written it he perused it with satisfaction.

"You lose," ran the despatch. "No. 31745 and Lansing are in Newport."

CHAPTER XI.

NOT THE TIME FOR LAUGHTER.

THE Nealises had a cottage on Bellevue Avenue, not far from the Casino. They were not in the inner circle of Newport society, but none the less, had a number of good friends among the substantial residents of the resort.

Young Nealis and Lansing, arriving in time for luncheon, found the house upset in preparation for a dance in honor of the daughter, Dorothy, a sprightly and beautiful girl of nineteen, who greeted the new arrivals with all the enthusiasm of one oppressed by the fear of lack of men at a Terpsichorean function.

"Now, you've got to be nice and dance a lot, Stewart," she warned Lansing. "You've been cutting under too much in the past year."

Lansing, who once had believed she was one of the few girls in the world, and still admired the radiant creature, smiled agreeably, declaring that a dance was the one thing he was yearning for.

"And so I am," he remarked to Nealis as they sat on the veranda after luncheon. "I sort of feel that I am to have a let-down, a breathing space, after all the exciting happenings I've been through."

Which shows all that we mortals know about the immediate future.

The two men, as well as Mr. Nealis, Senior, found themselves altogether in the way, what with the decorators and squads of servants turning things inside out in preparation for the dance, so the three went motoring out beyond Paradise, later stopping in at the Casino to watch some of the tennis finals. Topping this off with a dinner at Berger's they drifted around to the great cottage in time to dress.

Nealis and Lansing sat in Arnold's room smoking cigarettes, apparently in no hurry to go below and join the swirling throng.

Lansing did not feel himself, if truth be told. The sight of Helen Granger in the motor-boat had depressed him immeasurably.

"I can't afford to be mixed up with her any more, Arnold," he remarked as the two rose to go down-stairs.

Nealis, who did not know what his friend was talking about, nodded agreeably.

A dance was just ending, and at the foot of the stairs Lansing, to his utter astonishment, saw Helen Granger. She was attired in a creamy white gown, its color unbroken save for a dash of dull green in front of the bodice. Her bare arms and shoulders gleamed in the light and her head was poised like a goddess's.

She was conversing brightly with her partner in the dance just finished, and as Lansing came toward her she smiled brightly, dismissed the young fellow at her side with a nod, and advanced to meet Stewart, holding out her hand.

"Well, of all things, Mr. Lansing! This is delightful!"

Lansing's voice caught. He was ravished at the mere sight of her in evening dress.

"Aren't you going to speak to me? You mustn't hold my hand so long in public," she laughingly added.

"Miss Granger," Lansing at length managed to say, "I wish to speak to you—now. Is there a place where we can be undisturbed?"

She nodded, as though his request were the most natural thing in the world.

"We might go into the conservatory,"

and, turning, led the way, Lansing following.

Behind a group of palms there was a cane seat for two, and here they settled themselves.

"Miss Granger," he began, plunging at once into his subject, "why do you forgive me so readily for that scene the other night?"

"You misunderstood," she answered. "The police explained it to me. I don't blame you. And," she added, "I told you I loved action, or rather football—one and the same thing—and, I'm almost afraid to tell you, but I thought you thrilling that night. I have scolded my cousin Count Apponnetti"

"It was nice of you."

Lansing wanted to ask her how she came to be here, but found this breach of etiquette beyond him. "Look here, Miss Granger," he said instead, "you are doing something you ought not to do. Am I, who am so interested in you, not entitled to say this much? To warn you?"

"You will know all, very shortly," she smiled back at him "Just now—have I sufficient influence with you to ask that you withhold your opinion?"

"Influence! Miss Granger! Helen. Don't you know what your influence is! Don't you know, haven't you realized that you are the one girl I ever met who moves me to the very depths of my soul? When I am not with you I try to forget, try to keep you out of mind—"

"Why should you do that?" she asked quickly.

"But I can't," he hurried on, "and when I am with you it seems as though you swept me into the—the embrace of your personality and held me there, dominating me, filling me with nothing but, you—you—you! Helen, I love you, that's all. What you are doing doesn't matter to me. Nothing matters but you! My arms ache for you."

He stood up and bending down seized her bare arms with his hands.

Her star-like eyes were turned up to him.

"Please don't, Mr Lansing"

She drew away, shivering, and Lansing released his grip.

As she slowly rose he came very close to her.

"Helen! It is love! I love you! I won't live longer without you"

"Listen, Mr. Lansing—"

"Stewart!" he demanded.

"Stewart, listen. What you say makes me proud. I want you to—to—take me in your arms and tell me again you love me—just that, and then I want you to let me go."

With a glad cry he drew her to him.

"Helen," he whispered, "I love you."

"Now," she said, "kiss me—and let me go."

His lips lingered upon hers until she pushed away and the two stood staring wonderingly at each other.

"Stewart," she said at length, "when I told you to do what you have done I did it because I wanted you to know that I have given myself to you—to take when the time comes, if you want me, then. But the time is not yet—"

"The time! Not yet!" he cried.

"Not yet," she repeated, shaking her head. "No man has ever done to me what you have just done. I am sealed to you—so far as I am concerned. When you know all you may not want me. It was because of that fear that I asked you to hold me and kiss me. I—I," her voice trembled, "I wanted that much of you, anyway."

"But," protested Lansing, "you have all of me now!"

"No," she breathed. "No! You must wait—and see! Soon I shall ask you if you feel the same. Then—"

"But I can't wait," he returned. "Now is the time for you and me to stand together. You need me. I need you. You need my advice."

"Not now! Please, Stewart. This is awfully hard for me—just as hard as it is for you. Soon—patience, my heart; that is all I ask."

As Lansing was about to press his further claims he heard the sound of footsteps and as he drew back caught a glimpse of the full dress uniform of an officer of the engineer corps of the army. Helen saw it, too, and called.

"Oh, Jack, here I am." She turned hastily to Lansing. "Please go, for a little while. I wish to be alone. Please go."

She gave him a peremptory push and Lansing obediently moved toward the door, passing as he did so the fine looking young officer who was advancing toward the girl.

She was smiling and Lansing, after a swift glance toward the two who seemed engrossed in each other, did not leave the conservatory, but tiptoed swiftly into a

little grove of plants that effectually concealed him from those he had suddenly decided to watch.

Thus ensconced something of the mean nature of his deceit smote him, but he stifled his conscience with the thought that if he were to rescue this girl from the meshes in which she appeared to be involved he must balk at nothing.

"Jack, it is our chance to make fifty thousand dollars," he heard her say. "All you have to do is to hand out the papers and the whole thing is done. It is as simple as anything."

"But why me?" asked the officer. "Any person dressed as an officer could do it. I hate to play this part; besides it is dangerous, too."

"Don't be silly, Jack," Helen retorted. "What danger can there be?"

"My commission."

"Jack," she cried, "you are perfectly silly! Suppose there was just a tiny little risk. Look at the money. You wouldn't be cashiered; you might be court-martialed—"

He was studying her thoughtfully, and at length he nodded.

"Well, all right," he agreed. "You go ahead and when you are ready with your scheme let me know."

Then, to Lansing's horror, she went to him, and throwing her arms about the man's neck, kissed him.

Lansing cowered behind the plants as the two brushed past and then followed them out to the dance floor, sick at heart. To his great surprise he saw the officer walk straight up to Nealis's sister, and seizing her round the waist, whirl off in the dance with her.

Lansing avoided Helen, who, in fact, was claimed by Nealis, as soon as she appeared. He bent his attention to watching the officer and Dorothy, who soon wearied of the dance and walked toward the conservatory, laughingly conversing.

Lansing followed them warily, and as they made toward the seat he and Helen had occupied, he saw the blue arm slip about the white waist of Nealis's sister.

The young man's rage may perhaps be imagined. This Lothario apparently thought he had the run of this dance and could flit from flower to flower sipping honey like any busy bee. Well, magnetic as he was, Lansing determined to put a crimp in his present activities at least.

As soon, therefore as he could catch Nealis's eye he beckoned to him and drew him into a corner.

"Arn," he asked, "do you know that soldier chap who is here in uniform?"

"I suppose you mean the fellow who has been hanging around my sister all evening," Nealis yawned. "I—I believe Dorothy is going to marry him and that this shindig to-night is for the purpose of announcing it. It has been a secret among father and mother and sis. They didn't tell me before I imagine because of my known inability to keep things to myself."

"I see," Lansing nodded grimly. "So he's going to marry Dorothy, eh!"

"Sure, why not?" asked Nealis. "She has to marry some one, doesn't she? And he's a rather distinguished officer, I hear."

"Is he," growled Lansing, "what's his name?"

"Capt.— Capt.—" Nealis knit his brows. "By Jove, the name has gone clean out of my mind; I'll get it in a minute."

"Yes you will," retorted Lansing irritably. "In the meantime go and ask some one, will you?"

But Nealis's hand was on his friend's shoulder.

"I have it, Stew," he cried. "It's Granger, Captain John Halsey Granger."

"Granger!" It was now Lansing's turn to seize Nealis's shoulder and he did so with a grip of steel. "Look here, you mutt, what relation is this officer, Granger, to Helen Granger—you know the girl I've been having all this fuss over?"

"Helen Granger—John Granger. Well, I'm hanged if I know. Isn't it possible that they are not at all related?"

"It is possible," Lansing laughed, turning away, "but I'll wager you a new hat it isn't probable. Wait, I'll find out."

He ran off to find Helen, but she, as it happened, saw him first, as she came in from one of the veranda chairs.

"Mr. — er — Stewart," she said, coming up to him, blushing, "I'd forgotten, having so many things on my mind—but I want you to meet my brother, Captain Granger. Mother and—"

"Your brother!" Lansing almost reeled with relief.

"Your—"

"My brother," she repeated. "Does it really strike as you so absurd I should have a brother?"

"No, no, of course not," Lansing hastened to say, "only I—I hadn't heard—"

"Hadn't heard of his engagement to Dorothy Nealis? Well, no one else—I mean it hasn't been announced yet. Why do you act so queerly?"

"I didn't know you had a brother," he replied weakly.

"Well," she smiled, "now you know, I want you to meet him."

Suddenly Lansing was smitten with the thought that while this girl was not playing with his love she was nevertheless engaged in using her brother for purposes of espionage. He resolved to have a thorough clearing up of the entire affair, both for her sake as well as his own, to say nothing of Granger's and the girl the officer was to marry.

"Will you please go at once into the conservatory and wait for me there?" he said. "Go get your brother and take him, too. Please do it, Helen, and don't wait to ask questions. I'll join you both by the palms in a moment."

He hurried away before she could ask him a question and approaching Nealis and his sister he stopped them in the middle of their dance, and led them mysteriously to the conservatory.

"What's the idea?" grumbled Nealis, who had just entered into the spirit of the dance.

"I'll tell you both in a second—just as soon as Captain Granger and his sister arrive. Here they are now."

They were all gazing inquiringly at Lansing, who began to speak as soon as the formality of introducing him to the officer was concluded. He related the story of his first meeting with Helen Granger and ran rapidly through a recital of the various thrilling events that had subsequently occurred.

When he had concluded Granger smiled.

"All of this my sister told me," he said.

Nealis remarked he had heard it all before. Dorothy Nealis, to whom the tale was new, alone seemed interested.

"Well, now I want to tell you what you may not have heard," Lansing went on. "This whole thing is an espionage game against our country. Helen is mixed up in the thing and I intend to stop her, because—well, because I feel I have the right, under the circumstances."

Helen and her brother exchanged glances and then broke into a laugh.

"It is not the time for laughter," Lansing

continued, flushing angrily. "It is time for you, Helen and Captain Granger, to look about and see the danger you are in. I am credibly informed that Captain Granger has been induced to part with certain papers—"

Helen's increasingly loud laughter caused Lansing to stop short; he was actually glaring at her.

"Jack," she began, "I—I suppose we had better—"

"Better what?" asked her brother.

"I suppose," went on the girl, "we had better tell all." Her face grew serious. "I don't know what you'll think, Stewart; I've been afraid to tell you because—well, because I don't think you'll like me as well after you know."

"Well, for Heaven's sake, tell me, will you please, Helen!" implored Lansing.

"Say," cried Nealis and his sister, as though the thought had suddenly occurred to them. "You two act as though you were engaged, too."

"Perhaps we are," blushed Helen. "We'll all know later as to that."

Then she began to tell her story.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MAN IN THE BUSHES.

"YOU see, we are army people," Helen began, "and, as a consequence, not blessed with great wealth. But mother had a fair income, which was depleted by the fall in certain stocks since the beginning of the European war. Not that she did not have enough to live on comfortably; but, you know, a daughter is rather an expensive luxury."

"Yes," said Nealis emphatically, grimacing at his sister, who playfully pulled his ears.

"And I did not feel I could ask her to make sacrifices for me in the way of clothes, and—and, well, all the things we girls love. It was just about then that my mother's cousin-in-law, Count Apponnetti, who is interested in all sorts of things, came to me with a proposal to go into the moving picture business."

Lansing started, and the girl returned his gaze furtively, as though fearing the effect of what she was about to say. Nevertheless she continued bravely.

"I couldn't tell mother, of course; she would have been utterly shocked. And yet they promised to pay me so well that I

couldn't resist. As a matter of fact, I didn't care to resist because I had had a great deal of experience with the Bryn Mar Dramatic Club when I was at college, and always fancied I should love to be an actress.

"Well, they signed a contract with me for a fabulous sum—fifty thousand dollars—to take part in a war play as a spy. Part of the story is to be done here in Newport. We are arranging the final details at that horrid restaurant on Long Island when you, Stewart, took me away in your motor."

Fifty thousand dollars! Lansing's breath caught. He did not know a great deal about the moving picture business, but he knew a number of stage people, and was sufficiently well acquainted with their profession to realize that a sum so vast for a veritable tyro, a girl who had never appeared professionally or otherwise before the camera, was ridiculous on the face of it. Was she being duped? The old question arose with startling emphasis.

"Isn't that an immense sum to pay for posing one play?" he asked.

"Oh," she cried, "not alone for one play; I have a season's contract; it's so exciting! But they will pay me the entire season's money the minute we conclude the Newport part of the piece."

"I see," Lansing nodded.

Captain Granger was talking to Dorothy Nealis, and of the group Lansing and Arnold Nealis appeared the only ones interested in the dialogue.

"Well," Lansing continued, "was this Baron Rimini and those other chaps—I mean, who were they?"

"Rimini," replied the girl, "is the foreign agent of the Mammoth Film Corporation, and is interested, I believe, in producing this play abroad."

"Yes, and the others who were at that dinner?" persisted Lansing.

"Well," she returned, "Mr. Clarkin is one of the Mammoth firm, Count Apponnetti is one of the principal stockholders and that professional appearing man with the girl who looked like an actress is Damon Beal, president of the company; the woman is his wife."

"Where is Baron Rimini now?" asked Lansing.

Her face showed no change in expression as she replied:

"I don't know personally, but Count Apponnetti wrote me that he had sailed sud-

denly for England to adjust some matters relating to the play."

"Do you believe that?" inquired Lansing bluntly.

"Why not, Stewart?" She studied him curiously. "Is there any reason why I should not believe it?"

Lansing tossed his hands, convinced that she did not know that Rimini was under arrest in a hospital ward.

"You knew he went to the hospital, didn't you?"

"Yes, as a result of the fight. But Count Apponnetti said he remained there only a few hours."

"Oh," and Lansing nodded thoughtfully. "Didn't that mess I got into in your apartment trouble you?" he asked.

"Naturally," she replied, "but the count explained the misunderstanding; I didn't blame you, and neither does he nor my mother."

"Where is your mother now?"

"You are worse than Socrates," she complained. "She is over at Fort Preble at my brother's, where I, too, am staying."

"Of course," said Lansing. "Now, if you don't mind, Helen, will you give me further details of this moving picture plan?"

"Why, yes. As you may now realize, fifty thousand dollars will help mother a great deal. She needs it awfully, and while I realize you would object to my entering the profession, still, Stewart, I shall have to insist upon doing at least this much."

"Certainly, that will be all right," Lansing agreed. "But what are you to do? I mean about these papers and the like?"

"Why, as you know, Jack is connected with the engineer corps over at Preble. They are putting through plans of improved defenses. Now, Mr. Beal, of the film company, is a great stickler for the realities and insists that the great scene where the papers are stolen shall be acted at a real fort and by a real officer."

Lansing began to see the drift of things, but he said nothing, except to ask her to proceed.

"The picture is to show the rear of the fort and an officer stealing out secretly and handing a packet of papers to me. Then a guard sees me receiving them, fires his gun and pursues me. I run to the water-front, and noting that a yacht at anchor a little way off shore has not sent a small boat to meet me, I am obliged to leap into the

water and swim until I am picked up. Won't it be awfully thrilling!"

"And your brother will be the officer in question?"

She laughed.

"Yes. You know he rather disliked the idea because of the fact that the government might object to one of its officers acting in the movies. But as he is to wear a false mustache, no one save perhaps his brother officers and a few soldiers will know of it—and they won't think anything about it, because he is doing it to oblige me, his sister."

Captain Granger looked up and laughingly assented to this theory, adding that his sister was altogether too popular for her own good at the fort.

"Helen," Lansing said at length, "I want you to understand that I have no possible objection to your entering into this thing. I am not narrow. But—well, I am wealthy, and I ask you to make these fort pictures your last, fifty thousand dollars or no fifty thousand."

She looked at him, blushing and smiling.

"You don't know how queer and yet how nice it seems to have a master; I hear and obey my good lord." She bowed in mock humility.

"What's all this anyway?" cried Captain Granger, who had been able to withdraw himself sufficiently from his own devotions to Dorothy Nealis to catch the last few remarks of his sister.

"Why," responded Lansing, stepping forward, and taking the girl's hand, "it means only that I have asked Helen to be my wife—and that she has agreed—ouch!" The exclamation was the result of a ringing slap upon his shoulder delivered by Nealis.

"Great work, old chap. Beat, me, did you! Fine for you!" Dorothy Nealis was laughing excitedly and Captain Granger, who knew of Lansing by reputation, smiled approvingly.

"I am glad all of you are pleased," grinned Lansing, "and now that we all understand each other I have another proposition to make; when do you pull off your thriller?"

"To-morrow."

"Well, I'm going along, perhaps to play a minor part. I've often wanted to see myself as others see me, and besides, Helen," he added, "I have no intention of permitting you to leap into the water without my

being near. Some one might forget to pick you up in the excitement."

"Nonsense," scoffed Helen.

None the less, Lansing was persistent and it was finally arranged that he should report at the fort the next morning at 10 o'clock when the sun would be in the proper position for the pictures.

"And now," Dorothy Nealis interposed, "that we have had our little scene I think we ought to go out and join the merry throng. Although," she added, "I think it would be much nicer if we sent Arnold out and remained here. But we can't do that, of course."

Captain Granger led the way from the conservatory and Lansing claimed Helen for the dance then in progress.

It was their first dance and both were finished exponents of the art. The two swung in and out with intoxicating smoothness and grace, his face sometimes brushing her wonderful hair, his eyes gazing into hers.

"Stewart," she said at length, "you mustn't hold me so tightly. You are shocking people."

"Am I?" smiled Lansing. "Well, what do we care for people?"

"Nothing," she blushed, "only if you are going to be so loverlike, can't we go somewhere where—where we will be by ourselves?"

For reply Lansing stopped short, and taking her by the arm, escorted her out on the veranda, following this around the rear of the house until they reached the back steps. Before them lay an Italian garden, the marble decorations showing ghostly white in the moonlight, the trees and plants sharply defined in the poetic dimness.

They walked along the path as rural swains saunter along a country road, her arm about his neck, his about her waist, talking those soft sentimental things which are the vocabulary of lovers the world over.

At length they seated themselves on one of the marble benches, and Lansing, taking a cigarette from his case, struck a match. In order to kindle a strong light he formed a cup of his hands, the palms facing outward, according to a habit learned at sea. This cup converted the flickering match into a very fair substitute for a searchlight, and the long yellow ray cast forth landed upon the form which, as it seemed to Lansing, was just diving behind a clump of plants for concealment.

He turned quickly to look at Helen, but she was engaged with a tear in the hem of her petticoat, having caught her heel in it as she sat down.

"Just a second, Helen."

Lansing stepped quickly toward the place where he had seen the figure disappear, and found a man rising to his feet. At the same instant the lurking person threw open his coat, revealing the shield of the United States Secret Service.

"Not a word," he whispered. "I know you, Lansing."

"I don't know you," Lansing returned. "But your face is familiar. I want to tell you this: I have Miss Granger in charge now; she is my fiancée, and hereafter if I find you skulking about her, the results be on your own head; understand?"

Helen's voice came to him.

"Stewart—oh, I see you. To whom are you talking?"

"I'll be right there, Helen," Lansing replied in a casual voice. "Now then?" And he turned again to the man.

"Lansing, I like you," was the reply. "You're game, but your head is turned. Wake up—keep out of this, understand? Let that girl alone—don't let her make a fool of you, too."

"Of me, too! What do you mean? Who else is there?"

"There's her brother, for instance," was the reply. "I thought you were Captain Granger; that is the reason I trailed you both out here. It's a bad case, Lansing; on the level I am satisfied now that it is a case of love with you, but—listen—you drop that girl!"

Before Lansing could reply, and he meant to reply angrily, the other turned his back and was walking toward the house.

Lansing now remembered who he was—Clarkin. In the darkness he had at first failed to place him; but it was Clarkin beyond doubt, a secret service man, and hence a shrewd person, who was not given to expressing empty opinions.

Lansing walked toward his fiancée with a troubled face. He had not yet fully cleared his mind of the doubts engendered by the enormous sum of money the girl was to receive for participating in this play. Yet she seemed to accept the whole thing as perfectly reasonable.

Well, he would know more upon the morrow.

"Who was he, dear?" Helen's voice came to him sweetly innocent.

"It was a man who fancied he had the right to dance with you," replied Lansing, "but I convinced him of his error."

CHAPTER XIII.

CALLING ON GOVERNMENT HELP.

LANSING looked at his watch and found the hour approaching eleven. The girl noticed that his manner was distraught and rallied him merrily.

Lansing responded in kind, and thus the two went back to the house, entering by the conservatory, where Helen paused.

"Stewart," she said, "I want you to know how big and fine you are to understand what I am trying to do. I was silly, I suppose, but I believed, brought up as you have been and moving with the crowd you do, that you would be disgusted to learn that you had taken up with a movie actress."

"Oh, I'm not so conventional as all that," replied Lansing laughingly. "Then, anyway, you are not a movie actress, and even if you were—"

A couple were entering the conservatory and the two walked on out to the ballroom.

"Aren't you going to dance?" she asked, taking his arm and pressing it. "If you don't I shall have to dance with Mr. Nealis, who is coming this way now."

"Helen," Lansing answered, "I've had a rotten head all day. Oh, it's nothing," he added, seeing her concern, "but I haven't had as much exercise over the week-end as I usually get. Do you very much mind if I turn in?"

"Why, no, Stewart, certainly not. But I hope you are not going to be ill?" She was regarding him uneasily.

"Never fear. Only the excitement—and you made me forget all about my head, but now it is throbbing like the mischief."

She confronted him with sympathy glowing on her face.

"I wish," she said, "I could rub your poor old head; I have so much success with mother's headaches."

But, thrilled as he was by her solicitude, he declined her services.

"I shall be perfectly all right with a few hours sleep, dearest," he whispered. "My only bother is whether you mind my cutting out the dance this way. I—"

She interrupted him.

"You go, go at once, Stewart, and I'll see you at the fort as soon after nine in the morning as you can get there. You will come, won't you?" she added, catching a peculiar look on his face.

"Oh, certainly," he hastened to assure her. "I'll be on hand, never fear."

"I shan't be late, for once," chuckled Nealis. "I've never seen a movie show in process of creation and you'd better believe I'll be there with bells on. Ten o'clock, you said?"

"Yes." The girl nodded. "Stewart has a headache and is going to bed now."

Nealis, who had never heard of his friend having a headache, glanced at him in wonder, but smiled agreeably as he caught an emphatic wink.

"Well," he ejaculated, "that leaves me with a wonderful lady on my hands. You can't clear out too soon for me, Stew."

He bowed and offered his arm to Helen, who looked back and smiled at her lover, then disappeared with her escort amid the dancers.

Lansing waited until he caught a last glimpse of her creamy gown, then turning suddenly almost ran into Clarkin, who nodded curtly and hurried past him. He was now acting as a waiter.

"Well," murmured Lansing, "I don't want to talk to you, old top. I've seen all of you for a while that I wish. By to-morrow I hope to know whether you're the biggest lunk-head in the world or a candidate for Sherlock Holmes's job."

He certainly did not suggest a man who was suffering as he hurried out into the hall and stepped into a coat-closet under the stairs where he had noticed a telephone. He had recalled that he had a friend attached to one of the three submarine divisions at the Torpedo Station on Goat Island. This friend, Lieutenant Commander Dart, played a part in the plan he had suddenly formulated after his brief conversation with Clarkin in the Italian garden.

After a hunt in the telephone directory he eventually got the superintendent's office at the island. An orderly, apparently, answered the 'phone.

In reply to Lansing's request as to Dart's whereabouts, he got his telephone number in Officers' Row. There was considerable delay before the ring was answered, then came a sleepy and rather disgruntled "Hello!"

"Are you there?" queried Lansing, employing the English form of telephone salutation and utilizing at the same time a decidedly Anglican accent.

"Yes, I'm there," came the voice. "And who the devil is it?"

"Why this is Sir Stewart Lansing, the Grand Duke of Meadowbrook."

The reply was a burst of rather rueful laughter, coupled with the information that this was an unholy hour at which to awaken an officer and a gentleman.

"Look here, Bob," Lansing went on, "I have something of real importance to tell you—that is I wish to ask your advice. No, this is the real goods, no spoof at all. Can I see you now?"

Dart, interested by Lansing's manner of speech, told him that the ferry to the island left the Naval Landing at 11.30, and Dart would meet him at the dock.

"All right, I'll come right over."

Lansing slipped out of the closet with a light overcoat of his which he had hung there the previous evening, and a golf cap of Nealis's, and made his way out by the rear of the house.

At the Casino he signaled a cabman and was driven down William Street to Thames, thence along that narrow, picturesque thoroughfare to the Naval Landing. Several minutes would elapse before the little ferry-boat would leave on her trip across the harbor and Lansing, standing in the background lighted a cigarette.

The bell rang for the departure and a sailor was just beginning to cast off the lines when a man who had been lurking in the shadows, stepped aboard. Lansing felt certain the man was Clarkin.

He smiled grimly. For once, as he saw it, the secret service men were playing directly into his hands. Clarkin's appearance could not have been more opportune. In fact, he was so glad to see the detective that he was tempted to go to him and shake him cordially by the hand.

He followed the crowd ashore on reaching the island and found Dart pacing up and down on the landing stage.

"Well, Lansing," was his sombre greeting, "what's the idea?"

"Listen, Bob," whispered the newcomer, seizing his friend by the arms. "This is no idle jest. If you know me you know I'm not apt to be calling at this hour just for the fun of the thing. This is serious, blamed serious."

"All right," was the reply. "You may fire when ready."

Lansing glanced about him. Then nodded, as though in satisfaction.

"Bob," he proceeded, "we are going to be followed to your house. Now, I can't explain right here, but I want the man who is following us, seized and held under arrest until morning."

"Arrest!" Dart began to prick up his ears. "Arrest, eh! What are you putting over, anyway?"

"That's just what I have come here to tell you," was the impatient reply. "But I can't do it here. Have you any way of arranging to have this chap pinched without informing him of your purpose? He is watching us now."

The officer, like all of his sort, was a man of action. A jackie was hurrying by, and Dart called him in a low voice.

"Here you! Yes, you," as the sailor paused. "I want you to go to Captain Hatch, present him Lieutenant Commander Dart's compliments, and ask him to send a detail of marines. Have them conceal themselves upon the porch of my house, No. 8. Do you understand? Very good then, away you go."

He turned to Lansing.

"Now then, in order to give the men time we'll walk down the sea-wall past the torpedo boat slips."

Lansing nodded and fell into step with his friend, talking rapidly in low, eager tones. At almost every sentence his companion gave a low whistle of amazement, and was quite ready to agree with all that Lansing had to propose when the story was finished and he began to outline his plan.

"It all sounds good," was Dart's final comment. "Only—you are quite sure as to your ground?"

"I leave that to you to judge," replied Lansing. "I have told you all I know. It sounds reasonable to me, and I'm prepared to go the limit. As for you, the worst you can get is an inquiry into your conduct, which you can easily explain, while all the chances are that you'll earn an increased rating and a formal letter of thanks from the government."

"And you?" suggested Dart.

"As for me," Lansing hastened to say, "I want nothing, except what I can get in the way of straightening out certain messed up affairs. You go to it and the credit is all yours."

"All right." Dart looked swiftly about and saw a dark figure plodding back of them. "Our friend is still on the job," he chuckled. "I think we might as well go to the house now."

"All right." Lansing began to breathe quickly, for several important things depended upon the skill with which he handled details of the denouement which was now close at hand. "You see," he added, "what these people have been getting away with best has been their disguise as secret service men. Part of the crowd Griscom arrested in New York—that's all a secret, of course, as I've already told you—had secret service badges and were doing the detective game to the last notch."

"I see," Dart nodded.

"And so"—Lansing's breath caught—"and so if this chap pretends he is a secret service man watching me, why, don't you listen. That is, lock him up to-night and when the other matter has been pulled off you can have him before the commandant, or whoever is the proper person, and give him a chance to clear himself—if he can."

"Leave that to me," Dart answered, and turning away from the sea-wall, with its venomous looking black destroyers, he proceeded up a brick pathway and across the parade toward the row of officers' houses. Out of the corner of their eyes the two men could see their trailer following in their wake.

They paused in front of Dart's house, and then, talking earnestly, walked slowly up the path to the steps. On the porch both made out the glitter of buttons, and a second later Dart and Lansing were in the midst of a group of marines, crouching behind the porch railing.

"See that man out there?" whispered Dart to a sergeant. "Well, I want him seized and placed in the strong box over night. He'll probably tell you he's a secret service man, but pay no attention to that. Lock him up; beat him if he resists. Keep him there until you hear from the commandant in the morning."

The officer and Lansing went on up to the door, opened it and stepped into the hall, closing it with a slam. Then immediately partly opened it again on a crack.

"He'll come snooping up on the porch," whispered Lansing, "and make an effort to peep in through a window or something."

Which proved a true prophecy. The man stole up on the steps and was ap-

proaching a window out of which a light shone, with the curtain rolled invitingly up, when he walked into the arms of half a dozen husky marines.

He made no struggle, but was dignity itself.

"My man," he said, addressing the sergeant, "you are making a mistake. I am Clarkin of the secret service, and you'll find yourself in trouble if you don't dismiss your men at once. You understand me."

The authoritative note in the man's voice caused the sergeant to hesitate, seeing which Dart slipped out from the door and strode up to the group.

"Sergeant, take that man away from here at once. You had your orders, did you not?"

The officer saluted and turned to his marines.

"Take that man away and lock him up. Search him for weapons."

To Lansing's great joy a frisking process revealed a search-lamp and an automatic revolver, all of which dissipated any superficial doubts the sergeant or Dart may have had. The non-com officer would not even look at the secret service badge which Clarkin vainly tried to display. Instead he prodded him lustily with his big fist, told him to keep silence and ordered his men to hustle him away.

As he was being pulled down the steps it occurred to the bewildered man for the first time that Lansing was at the bottom of this incident, and a throaty roar of rage proclaimed his realization of this fact.

"You, Lansing—"

What more he would have said is problematical, for his protest ceased suddenly as the fist of a marine brandished before his eyes, with the threat that another word out of him would result in his being beaten to a pulp. It was thus in silence that he was led across the parade and thence to the administration buildings near the ferry landing.

So far Lansing's scheme had worked in a completely satisfactory manner, and further particulars could be left to Dart, who lost no time in putting them into effect.

Leaving the house, they went down to the sea-wall, and after a brief parley with a sentry stepped aboard the parent ship of the three submarine divisions.

In his capacity as commander of first di-

vision Dart at once proceeded to wake up the slumbering monitor. He sent an orderly to summon Lieutenant Landis, commander of the submarine X-3, a small craft of the early Holland type, and then went to the wardroom, where Landis soon appeared, a uniform jacket thrown over his pajamas.

As Dart unfolded the nature of his visit the youthful officer's eyes widened. He nodded from time to time, now and again interposing a question. Dart finished with him in fifteen minutes, and, rising, told him to be off to his bunk.

"Have everything ready," was his final injunction, "and don't fail me, Ted, in a single particular."

The lieutenant nodded, then bowing to Lansing, went out of the room to return to his cabin. The Wooster was connected with the various island departments by telephone, and Dart felt that the situation warranted his waking up the commandant. As it chanced, the latter was entertaining at bridge, and thus Dart was spared the apologies he had hastily prepared.

He ran over the events of the evening, stated his further plans and received the commandant's sanction to the holding of Clarkin under arrest until the next day.

"Now," Dart said, clapping his hands softly, "we've got everything ship-shape and Bristol fashion. You had better come up to the house and spend the night in a real bed—unless you want to stay here in my cabin aboard the monitor."

"Thanks," replied Lansing, who had his own notions of comfort and at the same time had reasons for wishing to keep constantly in touch with his friend. "I don't mind a comfortable bed at all and a navy breakfast," he added.

"All right," Dart yawned, "let's go home then, and turn in. By the way," and he glanced curiously at Lansing, "have you ever been down in a submarine?"

"No," was his reply, "but that doesn't frighten me."

Lansing shook his head.

"All right," laughed the officer. "I should suggest a good night's sleep at least."

In the meantime the Nealis dance had been running on into midnight and past that hour with undiminished ardor. Nealis, who quite approved of his friend's choice, had taken advantage of Lansing's absence

to pay the most assiduous attention to Helen Granger, and was devotion itself.

But his gallantry was not of the sentimental sort, or rather it was of a nature humorously sentimental, wherein a man recognizing that a young woman is spoken for indulges in mock drama, breathing prayers that Fate had been more kind to him and that even though she were plighted to wed, Lansing must look to his laurels lest he lose her.

All of which Helen took in excellent part, for, in the first flush of her new love, she had counted a great deal upon her lover's presence throughout the evening, and was sorely disappointed when he retired from the scene.* It took all of Nealis's humorous powers to rouse her from her gloom; but he succeeded eventually, and by the time he escorted her into the dining-room for supper she was prepared to enter merrily into the general spirit of the occasion.

"Love apparently doesn't set well with Stewart," observed Nealis, who, it may have been noted, was not over-supplied with tact."

"What do you mean?" she asked, eying him expectantly, eager for another laugh.

"Why, I never knew the old fellow to have a headache before in his life," Nealis explained.

"I'm sorry," she rejoined, "that I appear to have so unhappy an effect upon him. I'm really afraid he's going to be sick."

"Sick!" giped Nealis. "Never fear. Stew isn't the sickly sort. I don't know what ailed him to-night, but you can bet it wasn't—"

He stopped short, remembering for the first time Lansing's wink. But he had not stopped short enough. Helen caught him up instantly.

"You worry me, Mr. Nealis!" she cried. "What possible reason could Stewart have had for pretending he was ill?"

Arnold hastened to make amends.

"Oh, none at all," he asserted, "absolutely none at all. Stewart is the essence of honor. If you knew him as I—"

"I don't know how well I know Stewart Lansing," replied the girl, her pretty jaws squared and her eyes blazing. "But, Mr. Nealis, I ask this favor of you: Will you please go up-stairs and see how he is? If he is really ill he should not be left alone; he told me he had left his man in New York. Go, will you, please, for me?"

She placed her hand upon his arm, and

Nealis could for the life of him do nothing else than obey her.

"Very well," he sighed. "But I hate to leave you—"

"Think of my gratitude," she murmured. "Please go."

Nealis made his way up the stairs and walked down the hall to Nealis's room. He knocked upon the door and receiving no answer opened it softly.

He walked up to the bed. It had not been disturbed. With a quick indrawing of breath he switched on the electric lights. The room was empty. In the closet all of Lansing's clothing hung in orderly array, with no sign of his evening garments.

Nealis whistled softly.

"This is a pretty go!" he muttered.

He went on into his own room, but his friend was not there, and a search of the entire floor did not reveal a sign of him.

He descended the stairs with reluctant steps, and as Nealis had no Spartan control over his features Helen read his emotions with one glance.

"He wasn't asleep?" she asked quickly. "How is he?"

"Oh—" Nealis hesitated, "He is all right."

"Well, if he is all right," she flashed back, "why doesn't he come down?"

"He—he," stumbled Nealis, "I—I didn't mean he was all right exactly; I meant that his head isn't any worse—that he is not ill, see?"

Helen's suspicions were now thoroughly aroused.

"Then, if he is not any worse," she said, "I can see him before I go. Oh, yes, I must see him—I have something important to tell him."

"But you cannot wake him up, that wouldn't be considerate," protested Nealis.

"If he is asleep, how do you know his headache is better?" she inquired.

"Well," vouchsafed the distracted young man, "he was not struggling—"

"Not struggling!"

"That is," Nealis stammered, "he—he wouldn't be asleep if his headache was worse." He brightened. "Yes, that's it—you see if it was worse it would keep him awake."

She rose to her feet.

"I am afraid I shall have to ask you to waken him for me. He was talking with a strange man in the garden a while ago—and I must know who it was."

"You cannot go up, please, Miss Granger."

"Why can't I?" She faced him with a sort of quiet fury. "Please tell me one reason why I can't."

"Why—I'll tell you," Nealis said, his face lighting with inspiration. "Every time Stew goes to a dance he tanks up with

brandy; only at dances, understand. He's up-stairs now, ossified, lit to the ears."

"Is he!" She shook her head sneeringly and, suddenly turning away, went up to her brother.

"Jack," she said, "I want you to take me to the fort at once; I am feeling desperately ill."

(To Be Concluded.)

The Ring of Raaj



by R.K. Thompson

HUMMING a light tune the while he twirled his stick, Mr. Charles Dempster Haviland came sauntering down Fifth Avenue.

An unmistakably valeted young gentleman, his debonair manner would have led any one into supposing him without a care in the world. Quite the contrary, as a matter of fact, was the case.

Mr. Haviland had a great deal on his mind that particular morning. For one thing, he was bound on a most important shopping expedition. *The* most important of his life, indeed. Among his contemplated purchases was a plain gold ring, a half-dozen scarf-pins and as many bridesmaids' bouquets.

For, at the fashionable Church of St. Augustus, ten blocks farther up the avenue, at half-past three o'clock that afternoon, Mr. Charles Dempster Haviland was going to be married.

But first he was looking for a policeman. There was a man following him. Not by

any manner of means an ordinary man. The turbaned Hindoo in the loose black robe, who was fastened at the discreet distance of a yard or so to his heels, would have attracted attention anywhere outside the motion pictures of a Delhi Durbar.

Why the man was following him, and had been for the past ten minutes, Mr. Haviland did not know, nor could he even conjecture.

Descending the steps of his club, he had first set eyes on the dark-skinned stranger pacing to and fro along the curb in front of the Amblers'. The fellow had seemed to be waiting for some one. Save that he lacked the conventional pack over his shoulder, he might have been a wandering rug-vendor.

With only a passing glance at the "rum-lookin' doggie," as he had mentally characterized the Oriental at the time, Mr. Haviland, whose mind at the moment was occupied by far more important matters, had turned from the steps of the club to set off down the pavement.

When what had been his surprise to hear the Swami, pundit, or whatever the fellow was, fall immediately into step behind him!

The swarthy chap was shadowing him. There was not the slightest doubt about that, as Mr. Haviland had ascertained, by putting the question to a simple test, at the end of less than half a block. Slowing up, he had heard the shuffling footsteps of the East Indian behind him likewise retarded; quickening his pace, he heard those footsteps fall once more into exact accord with his own.

He it was, and no other, that the Hindoo was stalking. And it was then that Mr. Haviland had begun to look about him for a policeman.

The simplest means of getting rid of the cheeky beggar without a scene was to speak to some officer of the law; but so far Mr. Haviland had been pursuing his outwardly serene progress down Fifth Avenue without catching so much as a glimpse of a familiar blue uniform.

Now it looked as though he would have to take the matter into his own hands.

Whereupon, stopping short, Mr. Haviland turned and waited for his pursuer to come up.

"Did you wish to see me?" Charles Dempster inquired pleasantly.

The quaintly dressed foreigner, thus flatly confronted, betrayed no sign of emotion upon his countenance of milk-chocolate brown.

"Excuse, saar," he said quietly. "I have a reeng which I like to sell you chep."

A look of relief came into Mr. Haviland's face, making way for a slightly annoyed frown. Only the same old yarn! Of a diamond picked up in the street, which the finder, hurrying to catch a train out of town (or some such time-battered excuse) is willing to sell to a stranger for a third of its value. The gullible purchaser wakes up at the counter of the first jewelry-store or pawn-shop he enters, to discover that he has in his possession merely a very fair sample of domestic cut-glass set in genuine brass.

Frankly, Mr. Haviland was not particularly flattered at the estimation of his callow greenness implied by this faker's having singled him out to track down as a mark for any such threadbare dodge. He took a firmer grip on his stick.

"No, thank you!" said he curtly. "I don't want to buy any ring. Good-morning."

He set off down the sidewalk once more. To catch—or were his ears at fault?—no; those same shuffling feet *had* fallen again into pace with his own behind him!

Mr. Haviland turned abruptly.

"Let me see the ring," he said.

The Hindoo groped within the robe that enveloped him to the heels.

"I sell this to you for onlee one dollar," he said; "veree chep, saar."

Charles Dempster leaned forward curiously. The ring the other was holding out on his palm was nothing but a band of steel, or some equally plain and unattractive metal. It looked for all the world like one of those horseshoe-nail rings that were common a dozen or so years ago.

Mr. Haviland's eyebrows went up in surprise.

"Is this what you're trying to sell?" he inquired.

The East Indian bowed.

"And you want a dollar for it?" blurted Mr. Haviland. "Why, the thing's not worth a nickel—a penny! My dear fellow, let me advise you—this—"

Suavely the foreigner interrupted:

"He's veree chep reeng at thees price. Veree wondairful reeng, you find that out. Thees Reeng of Raaj. What you say—magic. Whoever buys and wears heem shall sell all that he buys after for double. That has been written."

Charles Dempster Haviland stared at the man. The Oriental's bronzed countenance was guileless, serious as a judge. Charles Dempster couldn't help it—he laughed aloud.

"Oh, come, now!" With twinkling eyes he shook his head at the Hindoo. As the latter's grave gaze displayed a shade of perplexity, the young man added, in a patiently explanatory tone: "Isn't that just a bit thick, you know?"

The Oriental's face had resumed its impassive mask. He bowed again.

"You do not believe it, saar? Well, you shall see. Buy thees reeng—put heem on your fignaire—wear heem all the time. Onlee one dollar you pay. Then you become veree greatlee rich."

Still smiling, Mr. Haviland shook his head a second time.

"No," he made the perfectly truthful statement, "I'm quite rich enough as it is."

Perhaps it surprised the East Indian to hear any mortal admit that he had sufficient worldly goods to content him. He

looked searchingly into the face of the elegant gentleman before him. Then, with a shrug:

"Leestan, saar, one minute to me," he went on. "Think: All you buy you sell for twice what you pay. Beeg theeng or leetle—all the same. Double the price returns always to you. But if still you do not believe? What harm, then, to pay so small a sum onlee to find out? To see for yourself? Come, saar—you take the reeng for one dollar."

With a glance at the passers-by, Mr. Haviland perceived that here and there eyes were beginning to turn curiously in his direction. As why not? Engaged in this sidewalk conversation with a man got up like the walking advertisement for some Coney Island side-show—what *must* he look like, anyway?

His cheeks turning a deeper pink, he impatiently drew forth from the inner breast-pocket of his well-fitting coat a wallet of gold-trimmed seal.

A dollar, after all, as the fellow had suggested, would be a cheap price to pay for an escape from this lunatic. For that he was insane, there was not the least particle of doubt in Charles Dempster's mind. An enchanted ring, indeed!

"There you are!" said he, in a tone that he was careful to make light, holding out a crisp, new dollar bill to the importunate seller. "Give me the ring—since you insist."

With a lightning-swift gesture the Hindoo accepted the bill and whisked it out of sight somewhere beneath his robe. Waiting to pitch the ugly thing into the near-by gutter the minute the other should have turned his back, Charles Dempster stood holding the plain circlet that now had been transferred to his palm. But the Hindoo still waited before him.

"That's all, isn't it?" the young man asked in surprise.

The Hindoo bowed with his former gravity.

"Put him on your fingaire, saar," said he, with stolid persistence. "You must wear heem. That is the law of the Reeng of Raaj. Othairwise the charm cannot pairform. Notheeng more; onlee wear heem—then you see magic work!"

Charles Dempster bit his lip to repress a second desire to laugh over the sheer silliness of the situation.

But anything to oblige this fugitive from

some Bloomingdale along the far-off banks of the Ganges!

Hugging his cane against his body under one elbow, he stripped off one glove. Trying the ring on the third finger at hazard he found that it fitted perfectly. It was the most hideous article of adornment that had ever insulted his gaze!

Hastily drawing the glove on over it, he snapped the catch, looking up to see if the foreigner was satisfied now. A startled glance, thrown to right and left, at once brought from his lips an involuntary gasp of relief.

There, bobbing away up the side street, was the Hindoo's white turban, easily distinguishable among the more commonplace derbies of the crowd. The fellow must have started off like a greased streak the instant he saw his customer about to put on the ring.

Charles Dempster felt for his cigar-case, and at the same time drew out his watch for a glance at the hour. Eleven o'clock! It behooved him to hurry if he was going to get those wedding things bought.

He opened the cigar-case and found it empty.

Confound Jordan, his man-servant! Looking around him from under a provoked frown, Mr. Haviland told himself that it was a lucky thing he was going to enter the state of wedlock so soon. Then, perhaps, he would be decently looked after.

His roving glance disclosed the fact that he was standing in front of the small cigar shop which was the one Mr. Haviland patronized exclusively for the brand of imported—and likewise highly expensive—cigars he smoked.

He went into the store.

The proprietor explained, with profuse regrets, that his stock of that especial brand was all but totally depleted. In the single remaining box on his shelves there was but a solitary *Pura Finos* left. Taking the one cigar, and paying for it, Mr. Haviland walked toward the door, taking out his cigar-cutter.

A man rushed up behind him.

"I beg your pardon!" exclaimed this man—a nervous, gaunt-faced individual. "You just bought a cigar—I want it. I overheard what you paid for it. Let me give you twice the price of fifty cents—one dollar for it. Many thanks, sir, you're most accommodating, I'm sure. This is a favor deeply appreciated. Good morning!"

The cigar snatched from his hand, something that crinkled thrust in its place, and Charles Dempster found himself, with fallen jaw and starting eyes, jammed up against the doorway by the hurried departure of the stranger.

Why should any man, spurred even by the most wild and uncontrollable craving for a smoke, in a cigar store, where there are hundreds, thousands of other cigars all around him, be satisfied with only one cigar, and that in no way unusual—except for its price?

And this fellow had doubled that. One dollar for a cigar was going some. Having taken in his quite ordinary appearance at that fleeting glance, Mr. Haviland recalled that the man had not looked as though he was used to buying dollar cigars.

Still, this might be the explanation of the incident.

Perhaps he had hurriedly left a wealthy client in some of the surrounding skyscrapers. The man of means might be in the habit of smoking this single brand. Finding that he was without a cigar, his host had dashed forth to buy him one, only to see Mr. Haviland purchase from under his very nose the last one of that particular brand in the store.

To secure it he had been willing to pay him a dollar, anything, indeed, since its possession would help him into the good graces of the person he was eager to please. Yes, probably after all, that was it!

Now, looking down at his hand, Mr. Haviland surveyed the crumpled bill which had been thrust there. He didn't want the thing. An Italian lad, peddling flowers, who passed just then, spying the vacant lapel of the gentleman standing in the doorway, selected a gardenia from the tray on his arm and held it up.

Stepping down on the sidewalk, Mr. Haviland accepted the boutonniere, affixing it to his coat. Dropping the dollar on the tray, with the reflection that such generosity had cost him scarcely anything, he told the youth to keep the change.

Promptly out of the stream of pedestrians along the pavement sidestepped a second stranger into his path.

"That flower you've got there," began this man abruptly—"will you sell it to me?"

Sharply Mr. Haviland drew back. Starting into the somewhat coarse, beefy face of the person thus bluntly confronting him,

his eyes widened while his brows knit in amazement.

He raised a hand slowly to the gardenia he had just put on.

"Do you mean," he ejaculated—"this flower?"

The stocky man jerked his head in assent.

"I know it's a cheeky thing to ask," he went on. "But that gardenia I've just got to have. As you see," and he held out his lapel, "I haven't any."

Charles Dempster promptly stepped aside.

"There," said he, revealing the vendor behind him, "is a whole trayful of these gardenias. Pray help yourself, and let me go on—"

"The one you have's the one I want," insisted the other. "I'm willing to give you twice what you paid for it—"

"You are?" quickly Mr. Haviland caught him up. His eyes were sparkling. "Then you'll make a very bad bargain, indeed. It may interest you to know that I've just given the boy a dollar for this flower."

In silence, the thick-set man produced his pocketbook and fumbled in it.

"Here!"

Before the proffered bills in this stranger's hand, Mr. Haviland again drew back.

"No!" he blurted. "No—really! I don't wish to sell!"

The man's arm shot out. Rudely he tore the flower from Mr. Haviland's coat, at the same time pressing the two greenbacks into his hand. And the next moment he had stepped back into the moving crowd, to be swept along in its course from sight.

Well, what was the explanation for this?

Charles Dempster moved on down the pavement. By this last incident, his mind was left blank.

He came to a halt, mechanically, in front of the imposing entrance of Gortley's, the jewelers. He lifted one hand in a dazed gesture to his brow.

Oh, yes! This was where he was going to buy his wedding ring.

Entering the store, Mr. Haviland gave the desired size and style of the ring he wanted to the salesman at the proper counter. He paid for it and waited for the small package to be wrapped up. And then he felt a touch at his elbow.

"Say," a tall, rawboned young man, with a prominent Adam's apple rising out of a

gray-flannel collar, got up from one of the leather-topped stools beside him at the counter and breathlessly addressed him: "Say—would you take a bid on that ring you've just bought?"

Just in time Mr. Haviland checked himself in the childish act of putting the package behind his back.

"You don't want this!" he exclaimed. "It—it's a wedding ring!"

The other nodded, with a somewhat sheepish grin.

"Stranger," said he, "that's just what I *do* want! I'm going to be married myself. Fact is, I'm in a mighty big hurry. Got to get this business settled, and quit town before two o'clock this afternoon. That ring you've got there's just the size I've been hunting all over this city to find—without any luck, so far. I'm afraid I'll never locate another in time. You'll excuse me speaking to you, I hope. I'm from the West—Jim Bagley's my name. If I wasn't in such an all-fired rush—"

Mr. Haviland slowly but emphatically shook his head.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said politely, "but I happen to be in a good deal of a hurry myself. I'd like to accommodate you"—and he attempted to sidestep the other toward the door.

"I'd pay you a bonus for the ring," the lanky stranger offered, again blocking his way.

Mr. Haviland reached down with one hand and felt of the tawdry ring on the third finger of the other hand under his glove. Shades of Aladdin and the Arabian Nights!

He said slowly:

"Twice what I paid?"

The man before him was already diving into his pocket. He brought up a wad of awe-inspiring size—the outer bill of which was yellow, at least. He unbuckled the leather wrist-strap which bound the bulging roll.

"Exactly," he said with alacrity, "what I was going to offer you! I'm sure much obliged! Two times seven-fifty's fifteen dollars. You'll find that right, I guess. Wish I could stop to tell you how much I appreciate this—but I'm off!"

He had taken the tiny box from Mr. Haviland's unresisting hand, placing therein three bills of five-dollar denomination—around which Charles Dempster's fingers closed involuntarily—and, suiting the ac-

tion to the words, hastened off up the aisle and out of the store.

Thoughtfully, Mr. Haviland followed after him, once more on the sidewalk outside passing his hand dazedly over his brow.

It had worked! These things, one after the other, *couldn't* have happened merely by coincidence. There was magic, enchantment—everything the Hindoo had said—in this ring.

Mr. Haviland looked around him at the passing throng. What wouldn't any one of them be willing to pay for the ring whose possession meant the road to wealth undreamed of? Ten times more potent than the fabled touch of Midas was this simple band of dullish metal now out of sight on his finger. Anything the wearer bought he sold for double—anything!

But was it, indeed, a talisman of luck? Its owner must *always* sell, sell. Sell for double, but nevertheless keep on selling.

Why, it was a curse to the wearer, instead! He couldn't keep anything he bought. That was a fact. What good was Mr. Haviland's wealth to him now? This ring, robbing money of its only value, had made a pauper of him. With it on his finger he couldn't even get married—

But, here! Mr. Haviland brought his racing thoughts up short. What rot! The thing couldn't be. It was too preposterous to be given a moment's serious consideration. It *couldn't* be, that was all.

And yet—

Slowly Charles Dempster turned the ring around under his glove. Suppose there was something in it, after all? There was just one way he could find out for sure.

Abruptly he walked to the nearest corner. Looking up and down the side street—there, only a dozen yards away, was exactly what he wanted.

Toward the excavation that was in the primary stages of being made in the street Mr. Haviland proceeded with determined tread. He stopped at the curb, piled high with asphalt paving blocks which had been removed from the uneven, gaping space in the surface of the thoroughfare. The foreman of the small gang of workmen looked up to see a well-groomed gentleman place his hand on top of the barricade.

"Pardon me," said Charles Dempster earnestly, "but will you sell me one of those paving blocks?"

The foreman turned the better to regard him.

"Sell you one?" he repeated slowly.

"Please," nodded Mr. Haviland.

"Well," said the foreman, shifting his quid, "seein' as them there blocks has been condemned by the city, I don't know but what I'm entitled to *give* you one. Take a block and go off an' play!"

"I don't want you to give it to me," insisted Charles Dempster. "For a very special purpose I want to *buy* one."

From his pocket he dragged the crumpled assortment of bills that had been thrust upon him in the course of the past half-hour.

"Seventeen dollars," he finished the slow, careful count. "Here you are," said Mr. Haviland, passing the whole amount into the man's hand. "And now, with your permission, I'll take this paving block."

Gingerly picking up one of the things, Mr. Haviland walked back with it to the corner and stood waiting.

He had not long to wait. A man bolted up to him—an elderly, rotund person, with a white tuft of whisker adorning each cheek.

"That brick you have there, sir!" this fourth stranger panted. "Quick—where did you get it? Did you by any chance pay anything for—"

Mr. Haviland paused.

"I paid," he then said slowly, and with emphatic distinctness, "for this utterly worthless paving block the precise sum of seventeen dollars!"

The elderly man whipped out a well-filled wallet.

"I must have that brick, young man!" he snapped. "*Must* have it, you understand? It means—here, I'll give you twice what you paid. I'll take your word for it. Seventeen, eh? Here, take this; it's yours. Give me the brick!"

He helped himself to it from Mr. Haviland's nerveless hand, and wheeled.

"Thank you, my young friend—thank you!" he flung back over his shoulder, and hastened back around the corner whence he had come.

Mr. Haviland stood staring after him. Then his wide gaze dropped to his hand. Methodically he unfolded the sheaf of bills and counted them.

Thirty-four dollars even! And for an old condemned paving block that had been taken, with five hundred just like it, out of the street where they were giving them away!

Charles Dempster turned, his brow suddenly damp.

"It's true!" he muttered, hastening off up the avenue in the direction from which he had come. "True—or else I'm stark mad!"

He was bound for the house of the family physician, Dr. Clinton Pruell, who, besides being a diagnostician of considerable note, also happened to be a dabbler in the mystic, things concerning occult phenomena, and particularly East Indian mysticism.

"Is he in?" Mr. Haviland blurted to the butler who opened the door for him at the doctor's home.

Bowing, the servant stepped aside.

"But engaged just now, sir," he informed Mr. Haviland in the vestibule. "One patient in the consultation room. But then you're next—"

"I can't wait!"

Mr. Haviland hurled the words back over his shoulder, already heading down the well-remembered hall toward Dr. Pruell's private office.

"I've got to know!" he told himself, taking the doorknob in his hand. And as he spoke he opened the door and stepped into the doctor's sanctum.

Dr. Pruell, seated at his desk, looked up. As, wheeling in his chair, likewise did the patient before him. At sight of the latter's face Mr. Haviland paused on the threshold. There was something, he did not know just what, that struck him as deucedly odd about this other individual's countenance.

"Doctor!" began Charles Dempster, out of breath, as he stepped forward. "I'm tremendously sorry—"

The physician had risen.

"Why, Dempster!" he exclaimed, smiling and extending his hand, "I thought this was to be your 'day of days.' Why aren't you donning your wedding finery? I was just thinking it would soon be time for me to put on full regalia in readiness to motor down to the church. You—is anything the matter?" he broke off, his expression turning momentarily grave.

Charles Dempster exploded.

"I have just been through an experience, or set of experiences, rather, that has made me doubt my reason, doctor! That's why I'm here—thus rudely, for which I ask your pardon.

"Dr. Pruell," he went on, "you must tell me whether I am out of my head, or—or if

these East Indian yogis are really able to work such miracles—”

The doctor, looking quickly from Mr. Haviland's face to that of the gentleman with whom he had previously been in consultation, smiled again.

“Dempster,” said he, “let me introduce you to Mr. Satterlee—Mr. Elmer C. Satterlee, of Larchmont, up the Sound,” he added explicitly, as, the last-named person rising, he and the impatient visitor shook hands.

“Sit down, Dempster,” the physician went on. “You haven't interrupted us. Mr. Satterlee has just finished telling me a most interesting story.”

Still standing, Dr. Pruell nodded both callers toward chairs, and waited until they were seated—somewhat reluctantly on Charles Dempster's part, his unrelieved perturbation still plainly showing on his face.

“And now,” their host resumed, “I am going to ask Mr. Satterlee, as a favor, if he will repeat briefly what he has told me. You will oblige me, Satterlee? Thank you. Now, Dempster, pay heed to this. I found it most entertaining, indeed. And I'm quite sure you will. If you will begin, sir?”

Charles Dempster half rose.

“But really, I'm in such a state of mind—”

The doctor had seated himself.

“Be quiet, my boy,” he ordered blandly, “and listen.”

Satterlee crossed one leg over the other. He shrugged, patently at a loss just how to tell a story to one who had already heard it and another who was a stranger.

“Why, it's like this,” he said. “I live up in Larchmont, as the doctor, here, has just said. In the same house with my uncle—that's Darius Broxton, you know, the retired sugar-refiner. I'm sort of a secretary to him. Look after any little business he may still have to transact, and so on. Though I don't do it for hire, you understand. I've got a little means of my own. It—it happens to be ten thousand dollars in bank, left me by my mother, since that's got to do with the rest.

“Well, my uncle has a ward. A nice enough sort of girl. The plain-but-good type, if you know what I mean. She lives with us there. We hit it off together, well enough; but just as good friends, nothing more. As it happens, I—er, I'm greatly infatuated with another girl.

“But my uncle's being so fond of Janet—that's the homely one—I got to thinking: Did he expect me to marry his ward some day? And if I didn't, where would his money go after he died? Would any of it come to me, as his only flesh-and-blood kin? Or would I be disowned through one of those story-book provisos, concerning the proper marriage for me to make? Naturally, I was anxious to know where I stood before I became engaged to the girl of my choice.

“Well, now that gets me to the point where I can tell about the Hindoos. The dark-skinned hokus-pokus chaps that are all the time buzzing round my uncle. As you may have read, he's a crank on the subject of crystal-gazing, and all that sort of stuff. The house up there in Larchmont is just about overrun with a tribe of Swamis, yogis, and so forth, all the time.

“One day last week I stopped one of these chaps in the hall. I asked him—the Great Naigai, this was, and the king-pin of the lot that has Uncle Darius on the string—if he could really peep into the future, or through brick walls, and all such rot, when he wanted to.

“The faker looked at me hard. Then he wanted to know why I asked. And so I told him. That I'd like to know what was in my uncle's will, without waiting. It might mean a good-sized fortune to me to know—not to make the mistake of marrying the wrong girl and getting cut off. If this chap, or his tribe, could tell me what that will said regarding that one particular point I would be willing to pay well for it.

“I remember that the fellow kept watching me sharply. Being wise, he had found out through my uncle before this how much I was worth. He knew I was skeptical of him, and of his crowd, and of their tricks. Still, you never could tell. Some day I *might* be taken in by them for something some way. And now, sure enough, here I was ready to bite at last.

“An even thousand, he told me, was his price to tell me what I wanted to know. That was pretty steep; but I was game. If he could really do the thing, I'd pay up and gladly.

“Only—no buying in the dark. First he'd have to show me. Prove whether he had supernatural ability—make a test, so to speak. This Naigai said he could do it. But it mustn't be up there. My uncle

might get on to what I was dabbling with his strange little playmates for. The Hindoo said I could go anywhere for the test. 'New York City?' I asked him. That would do, yes. But, I stipulated, there was to be no taking me into some room already rigged up with clap-trap. I refused to be fooled. He'd have to play square. So what could he give me in the line of a test?

"He thought for a minute or two, and then he asked me at what hotel I would stop in New York. That made me stop and think. The fellow certainly sounded mighty sure of himself. If he and his gang started pulling the sword-and-basket stunt, or maybe the growing-mango-tree trick around the halls and lobbies of any hostelry, there'd surely be a rumpus. And that I was mixed up in it would be just as certain to get back to my uncle. And then I thought of my friend, Dr. Pruell, here—he could put me up at the Amblers', as he'd often offered to do. I told Naigai that was where I'd go.

"Start to walk down Fifth Avenue between ten and eleven o'clock next Monday morning, from that club,' the Hindoo directed me, 'and you will see a test of the supernatural that will convince you—done in no closed room, but out in the open air itself!'

"Well, that's all. I came down last night, and I slept at the club. When I got up this morning, though, I had cold feet. Those same stunts I've mentioned might be pulled off in the street. I tell you, that East Indian had me going with his confident way of talking. I was afraid of all sorts of unpleasant publicity. So I stayed in the club's smoking-room till an hour ago. Then I came around here to ask Dr. Pruell's advice. What I'd better do about believing the fellow was a genuine seer, and all that. And the doctor has told me—"

Charles Dempster, no longer able to restrain his impatience, here rose very abruptly.

"Pardon me!" he broke in upon Satterlee's words. "Doctor, I wish you to hear my case at once! This morning I was followed by a foreigner, who sold me a ring for a dollar. And with it on my finger I have been unable to purchase and keep another dollar's worth of anything since. I was told by the man that the ring was enchanted—"

Still smiling, Dr. Pruell rose. He requested Satterlee to do likewise, and then he turned him and Charles Dempster around to face the mirror in the room.

"There's the explanation of what is the matter with you, Dempster?" the physician informed the latter. "You look too much like this young gentleman. Can't you see it yourself?"

Staring into the glass, from the face of the stranger beside him to his own mirrored countenance, Mr. Haviland could see that they bore a startling resemblance to each other. This, then, was what had struck him as being so peculiar about the other's face when he had first seen it.

Slowly, Charles Dempster turned back to the physician.

"Isn't it all clear to you now?" the latter questioned. "This was the test that was to be made to Mr. Satterlee. The Hindoo's proof of his ability to produce miracles. So that he could get hold of his thousand dollars for making a guess—it would have been nothing more than that—as to what was in his uncle's will. The demonstration was made to you by mistake. You say you were given a ring, and told that it would make you sell whatever you bought after that for double? Then all sorts of people began coming up to you every time you bought anything—"

"They did!" almost snapped Mr. Haviland. "They most certainly did! Men, absolute strangers to me, snatched everything away from me as fast as I paid for it. I met four in all—"

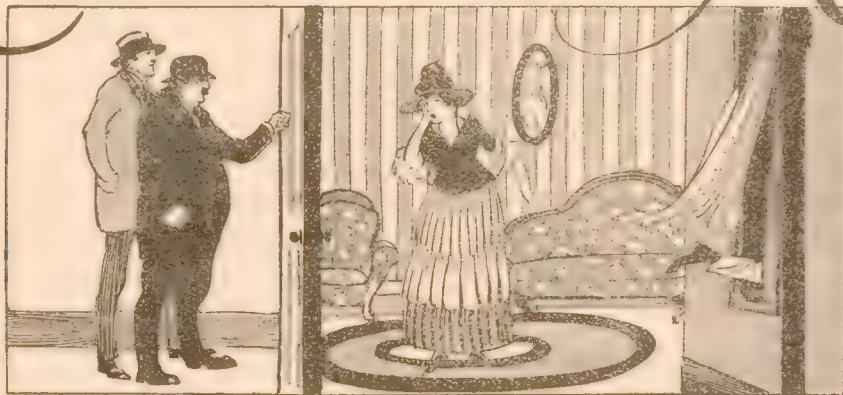
"Not 'met,'" corrected the doctor. "They were all hired 'supers' in the game, who had been following you from the moment the Hindoo left you. Ready to bob out each time you made a purchase, each one a different individual to help make the charm seem really at work. A game, Dempster, my son—that's all it was!"

Mr. Haviland was slowly unbuttoning his glove. A light had broken on his face. He looked at the doctor and then at his double, Satterlee, from Larchmont. And, walking to the open window, with a rather sheepish smile, he thrust his hand out of it.

There was a tinkle on the pavement below.

"Well, now, if you'll excuse me," said Mr. Charles Dempster Haviland, starting toward the door, "I think I'll go and buy that other ring!"

Castles in the Air



By Casper Carson

A THREE-PART STORY—PART TWO.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS ALREADY PRINTED

THOMAS G. BRADLEY, always building air-castles because he feels he is rightful heir to the Bradley fortune, falls in love with Muriel Stockton, a country girl to whose people he has tried to sell a washing-machine from an automobile belonging to his cousin and deadly enemy, Harry Bradley. The young people elope to New York, but the marriage must be deferred until the next morning because a license cannot be procured till then. Meanwhile the police are hot on Tom's trail, because of his appropriation of the other Bradley's car, to say nothing of the killing of one Horgan, a detective from whom Tom has escaped by stepping aside as the police official precipitates himself against a door, thus permitting the man to strike his head on a heavy piece of furniture when he falls in. As soon as Tom hears that Horgan is dead he resolves to disguise himself as his cousin Harry and endeavor to get away on the latter's steamship bound for Norfolk. He presses what is left of his money on Muriel, sees her to her boarding-house, and then discovers that he has not enough to settle with the taxi man who declares that he will turn him over to the police.

CHAPTER X.

PLAYING A BOLD GAME.

IT was not a time to hesitate. That cop on the corner constituted a very vital menace to Tom's safety; and the rule nowadays is, "Safety First."

The chauffeur was, of course, clearly on the side of the law—the statutes in such cases made and provided; but he was also up against that old first law of nature, self-preservation. He had made a declaration of war. On his own head be the consequences.

As he turned to signal to the policeman, he carelessly exposed an unguarded sweep of jaw, and quick as lightning Tom drove

in against it with the full power of his clenched fist in a straight-arm smash from the shoulder.

Just about half-way between the ear and the point of the chin the blow landed, and the call which had been on the tip of the chauffeur's tongue remained unuttered.

Instead, he collapsed like a sack of meal, and plunging forward, sprawled his length along the curb just between the two wheels of his cab.

Straightening up, Tom gave a hasty glance around. The cop's head was still turned in the other direction; no one seemed to have observed the incident.

It was on one of those rather dark, comparatively unfrequented blocks between

Seventh and Eighth avenues below Twenty-third street, and there happened at the moment to be no pedestrians on Tom's side of the street, while from the one or two loitering along across the way the encounter had been screened by the taxicab.

Moreover, even if any one had been looking, it would have been almost impossible to tell what was taking place from one hundred feet off; for the shadows were a little thick at this point, and the dingy, basement cigar store threw but a feeble illumination across the sidewalk.

Tom felt sure that, so far at least, his desperate maneuver had escaped attracting attention. And satisfied on this point, he turned and started back in the direction of Seventh avenue.

A faint groan, a half-convulsive movement on the part of his prostrate adversary—the indications of returning consciousness—warned him that the coma induced by his wallop would not last long, but that at any moment the man might be struggling up to raise a hue and cry after him.

Nevertheless, he restrained his inclination to run. That would be the surest way of drawing observation to himself; and observation just then was what he especially desired to avoid.

Therefore, he forced himself to proceed only at a brisk walk and to refrain from looking back over his shoulder. Solely by the exercise of an iron will did he accomplish this.

Never had he dreamed that a common city block could spin itself out to such an interminable length. On and on it stretched ahead of him, the haven of Seventh avenue, like the mythical foot of the rainbow to those who go a-seeking for it, never seeming to come any nearer.

All human ordeals must end in time, though. He reached at last the dingy saloon which graced the corner, with its little knot of loafers about the entrance, and repressing a final impulse to break into a run he rounded it successfully, and felt his heart leap with a great bound of relief.

Luck was with him! He still had twenty minutes before his boat sailed, and just ahead of him, ranged along the curb, stood another taxicab.

Tom made a dive for it.

"To the Bradley Line pier," he snapped. "And hurry!"

The chauffeur cranked in a rush and

sprang to his seat. Just as they whirled away Tom thought he heard from around the corner the sound of shouting and the thud of hurrying feet. Was it the start of a pursuit after him? He did not stop to find out, nor did he ever know.

Through the crooked streets of old Greenwich Village they raced, and so out to the broad expanse of West street and down the water-front with its long piers, and the big vessels with their stumpy funnels lying in between like Gargantuan babies in their cradles sticking fat legs and arms up into the air.

There was still five minutes to spare before sailing time when they reached the end of the Bradley Line dock, and drew up close to the big, black hull of the *Essbee*.

Tom lurched out of the taxi and staggered over to the man at the foot of the gangplank.

"Tell the purser I want to see him," he directed thickly. "'M Captain Bradley."

As he spoke he reeled slightly, and in catching his balance pushed his hat back on his head. The man saw that powdered poll, and, never questioning the man's identity for a moment, saluted respectfully and hurried off with the message.

There was a play in New York several seasons ago which depended for much of its success upon the interpretation of a polite "drunken scene" by the leading man; and it had been one of Tom's stunts when out in company or with a crowd of fellows to give a faithful imitation of the actor in this role—an experience which now stood him in good stead.

Certainly, the purser—fortunately a new man who had never seen Harry Bradley more than once or twice—entertained no doubts when he came hurrying down the plank, either that the gray-headed man swaying and blinking there on the pier was his employer, or that he was distinctly in his cups.

"'Lo, purser!" Tom greeted him vociferously. "Got a stateroom anywhere aboard there where you can stow me away? Guess I'll take a trip with you this time if you don't mind. Been out with the boys, y'understan', and had too many of those soft drinks."

He hiccupped.

"Want a place where I can be quiet, and sort of re-re-recuperate. Goin' t' lemme have it? Eh? Goin' t' lemme have it?"

"Sof' drinks never did agree with me."

"Anything you want, of course, Captain Bradley." The purser spoke soothingly. "We are quite full up this trip, but I think I can fix you satisfactorily. Come right aboard, sir. Hadn't you better take my arm? I'm afraid you'll find it a little steep going up the plank here."

Tom hooked on to the elbow presented to him, and allowed himself to be guided stumbingly forward. Just as he started to set his foot on the gangplank, however, he paused, pretending to catch sight of the cab driver who was edging in toward them.

"Oh, by the way, purser," and he waved a lordly hand, "settle for my taxi, will you? Y' see," he giggled, as the deluded official obligingly dived his hand into his pocket, "I've come off without a cent, and without even a clean collar. Guess I'll have to borrow all the way to Norfolk? Eh, what?"

"Don't you worry about that, Captain Bradley. We'll see you through all right. Whatever you want, that you don't see, just ask for. And now shall we go ahead, sir?"

The two slowly ascended the sloping way, while the taxi driver, looking startled, turned back to his cab.

"Well, what do you know about that?" he muttered as he drove away. "I would have sworn that feller was sober as a judge when I took him on; yet, here when I lands him, he is fair pickled. Never did I see red liquor take a man so quick before."

In the meantime, Tom Bradley, turned over to the fostering care of a steward with instructions that he be shown every attention, had been conducted to the most gorgeous cabin on the boat, and alone at last, was felicitating himself upon the full success of his daring coup.

"Talk about falling into clover!" he chuckled. "Could anybody want it softer than this? And the joke of it is, that the very man who's trying hardest to catch me is the one that's putting up for my getaway."

"Anything you want, Captain Bradley," he mimicked the obsequious tone of the purser. "Well, I guess the Bradley estate will have some juicy bills to pay for this trip. And it isn't stealing, either. I am simply taking what by right belongs to myself. Oh, I can imagine how my dear cousin will cut up when he finds how neatly he has been sold. That is," he sobered somewhat suddenly at a suggestion which had come to him, "if the darned wireless don't happen to tip it off what's been done."

Even this very imminent probability failed to make any deep impression on him, however. He had been too successful in slipping through the drag-net of the police and getting out of New York unapprehended to believe that any untoward circumstance could not arise to interfere with his escape.

"Something will turn up," he told himself confidently, "static conditions, maybe, or a break-down of the apparatus, to keep them from getting on to the play until I am safe landed at Norfolk with a wad of their good money in my pocket."

And laying this flattering unction to his soul, he arrayed himself in a suit of the purser's pajamas, and retired comfortably to bed.

But whether there was some lurking uneasiness over the outcome in the back of his brain, or whether the exciting episodes of the evening still held sway over him, he found it impossible to get to sleep.

The throbbing of the machinery disturbed him; he found himself listening to the sound of footfalls on the deck outside; finally, two passengers who occupied an adjoining stateroom entered and started to engage upon a seemingly endless discussion.

Tom strove to shut his ears to the low hum of their conversation, but in vain. The stateroom partitions on the *Essbee* were not calculated to deaden sound, and every word that was uttered, although his two neighbors were evidently making an effort to speak in an undertone, reached him distinctly.

He tossed and turned upon his pillow, coughed to let the men know that they were being overheard, pulled the bedclothes up over his head, tried to divert his thoughts to other channels; but it was no use. Stubbornly the two next door kept up their low-toned colloquy.

"Might as well be next to a cage of poll parrots," he growled at length. "What's the use of being owner of the line if you have to have your night's rest spoiled by a couple of pests like that?"

He reached out a hand for the push-button, intending to summon a steward and voice his complaint; but halted in his purpose as he caught a remark from the other side of the partition.

"By George!" he breathed softly. "I guess I won't muzzle them just yet a while after all."

He drew back his thumb from the push-

button, edged over cautiously in the bed until his ear was directly against the partition, and then lying very still, eavesdropped for all he was worth.

"I tell you, it is Captain Bradley," one of the voices was raised a bit angrily, as if in argument. "I don't care what the purser said to you; he'd lie of course under the circumstances. It's Harry Bradley, all right, and he's tipsy as a lord."

"Well, supposing it's true, what's the answer?" growled the other.

"Simply this: that he's playing the same game we are, and sneaking out of New York by the back door to keep any of the rest of the crowd from knowing where he is bound. You mark my words, though, as soon as he strikes Norfolk, he'll be heading for the Southwest, just as we are planning to do."

"But what makes you think that?" objected the other voice. "Mightn't he be only—"

"What makes me think so? Because I know it, because I feel it in my bones. Now, here's the case in a nutshell: The British Purchasing Department has got to have those horses in St. Louis by July 20th. It's a special order for extra high-class stock, and the way the field's been scratched over, it's going to be hard to fill at any chance of profit. You and I know what's to be had as well as any two in the business, and we'd about agreed to pass this order up, hadn't we?"

"Then by a streak of luck," went on the speaker, "we get wise to this bunch of horses down in New Mexico that have been overlooked, but which fit into this British order just as if they were made for it. And, best of all, we hear that the innocent old guy that's got 'em will let 'em go at a knock-down price of \$75 a head, which means clear velvet for us of anywhere from \$40,000 to \$60,000 on the lot of four hundred."

"Fine, ain't it, Bill?" His voice took on a satiric tone. "That is, provided it's all true, and that—"

"Now, there you go!" railed the other sharply. "Always throwing cold water. Could anybody ask for straighter information than we've got? Ain't Engelhard always been on the square with us? But you; you just can't help knocking. If you want an argument, though, I'll bet you that the layout is just as he represents it, and

we'll put up any amount you say. Money talks."

"All right, all right," his companion interposed hurriedly. "I'm not questioning either Engelhard or you in the matter. What I was going to say was this: Granted that it's all as he says, how long do you think a thing of that kind has a chance to be kept quiet? But I've been afraid that somebody would get in ahead of us."

"But Engelhard says—"

"Oh, I know what Engelhard says. But snaps like this have a way of getting out. It almost seems like the information was floating in the air sometimes. Engelhard got next to it, didn't he? Well, then, how can we tell but that somebody else's scout might not have turned up the same thing?"

"What makes you think that, though, that Harry Bradley is on?"

"Well, look at the facts for yourself. We know he's been hard hit on a lot of these war contracts he's been trying to swing, and also that he's been hustling for all he was worth to land this British horse order. Then, if he learned where he could fill it, and at the same time pull down a profit that would help materially to make up his back losses, he'd be very apt not to trust to any agents or middlemen, don't you think, but to go after the deal in person?"

"There's the reason, to my mind, for this sudden trip of his. He certainly has some pretty strong object in view; for I happen to know that he has business of the greatest importance which requires his presence in New York to-morrow."

"Yes, sir, Bill," and the man spoke with gloomy conviction, "you take it from me, Captain Harry's got that tip all right, and he's breaking his neck to go after it. Then with two of us bidding against each other for those horses where's any profit going to show up? Why, his very jag proves what Bradley's up to."

"His jag?"

"Certainly. When a man like Bradley, that's usually a pretty temperate sort, goes on a bender, it shows one of two things, either that he's trying to drown his sorrows or else that he's celebrating. And from the way he was acting when he came aboard, this was one of the celebration kind. A man couldn't have acted more pleased if he'd heard that his mother-in-law was dead. It was the news about this bunch of horses, I tell you; and it sounded so good to him that he simply had to get lit up."

"Well, it may be as you say," conceded. Bill, overborne by the other's argument. "And, if so, what are we going to do about it? We can't go to bucking Bradley. If we did, there'd be nothing in the deal for anybody. Haven't you got an idea of some kind?"

"Well," his partner pondered judicially, "as I see it, there's just two ways that we can deal with the situation. We can either go in with him on an agreement to split profits, which a high and mighty fellow like Bradley probably wouldn't stand for; or else we've got to lose him and get to this place with the ungodly name—"

"Cherrichuppa Ranch, New Mexico."

"Well, whatever it is, we've got to get there first. Captain Harry must be left behind."

"You don't mean—?" gasped the other.

"Oh, no," with a laugh. "We don't have to go to that extreme. I've got a whole lot better scheme than that. Now, listen. Drunk as he was, Bradley's probably dead to the world by this time. We'll find out where his stateroom is, sneak in there and pour a couple of these calomel powders, which I happen to have with me, into his mouth."

"Oh, I see," Bill chuckled relievedly. "You simply want to lay him up."

"Exactly. If we get a couple of those powders down Captain Harry's throat I'll guarantee that he'll not be leaving Norfolk to-morrow; no, nor the next day, either. And in the meantime you and I will be well on our way to—I can never think of that darned name."

"Cherrichuppa Ranch? Sure. And I can tell you another thing, too. Captain Bradley's stateroom is No. 17A, right along this corridor. There's no use waiting, is there? Let's drop in on him and get the job over with."

Tom rolled softly away from the partition and meditatively felt of his biceps.

"So those ducks think they're going to come in here and choke a couple of calomel powders down my throat, do they?" he grinned in the darkness. "Curious, but I have a sort of premonition that they are due for a surprise."

The fog-horn of the *Essbee*, which had been working continuously all through the night, sounded again at this moment, and its blast was still reverberating when there came a tremendous crash which shook the entire vessel.

The force of it hurled Tom headlong from his berth to the floor, where he lay dazed until aroused by the pounding of a steward on his door.

"Put on your life-belt and get on deck, sir," urged the man. "The ship is sinking."

CHAPTER XI.

STAYING BY THE SHIP.

SOMETHING had turned up with a vengeance!

Proceeding down the coast in the dense fog the *Essbee* had been rammed by a floating derelict.

Tom made a hurried dive for his clothes, and while he raced into them his eyes were busy with the scene of havoc about him.

By only a hair's breadth had he escaped destruction; for not a foot away from his bed ran the line of jagged and broken beams which marked the passage of the derelict. Had that clumsy craft struck head-on, instead of in a slightly diagonal direction, he must inevitably have perished.

As it was, the brunt of the impact had been spent upon the adjoining stateroom. Glancing across to the tangled mass of wreckage which was all that remained of it, Tom saw with a thrill of horror two crushed and mangled forms.

Less lucky than himself, the two horse-buyers whom he had heard plotting in there had been caught directly in the path of the collision and snuffed out as helplessly as a couple of field mice under the turn of a plow-share.

He had little reason for sympathy with these men; even their names were unknown to him; they were, so far as he was concerned, but two voices. Yet the sudden blotting out of a human life is with even the most callous of us an awesome thing.

Averting his eyes from the ghastly spectacle, Tom hurriedly finished buckling on his life-belt, and piled out through the door of his stateroom to the deck. It was no time to linger; for the *Essbee* was sinking fast.

Up forward a little knot of men, the captain among them, were preparing to launch the last boat.

"Captain Bradley!" The skipper turned with a quick frown, as he saw Tom making his way toward them across the sloping deck. "I thought you were off long ago."

"Come now," he spoke sharply with a

wave of his hand toward the boat. "Get in here. There is not a second to waste."

There was no doubt of the urgency of the warning. The deck was tilted to an angle of almost forty-five degrees. The starboard rail beside which they were gathered lacked but a few inches of being awash.

Nevertheless, Tom showed no haste to obey the injunction. He cast his eye over the number already in the boat, reckoned with a glance those still to go in, saw that there could not fail to be dangerous overcrowding, and stepped back with folded arms.

"After you, my dear Alphonse," he nodded to the captain.

"Nonsense!" and the captain ripped out an impatient oath. "Get in there, as I bid you. I am not going."

"Well, then, neither am I," retorted Tom with equal firmness. "I am the owner of this line, remember, and it's my privilege to be the last man to leave the ship."

The captain said nothing for a second, but went ahead filling up the boat. At last there was but one place left. It was evident that one of the two men would have to remain behind.

With a sudden flash of his eye, the skipper whirled upon Tom.

"Owner or no owner, Captain Bradley, this is a vessel on the high seas, and I am in supreme command. I'll stand mutiny from you no more than from any other passenger. Now you get aboard there," his big fist clenched, "or, by the Lord Harry, I'll have you thrown in."

As he spoke, he glanced toward two sailors who were already in the boat, and in response to the signal they half-rose from their places.

Tom, however, yielded not an inch to the show of force. He was the rightful owner of the Bradley Line, he told himself; and that being settled in his own mind, it was as natural for him to play the part to the limit as it was for him to breathe.

"So you're in supreme command, eh?" He drew himself up with dignity. "Well, listen; I give you your discharge here and now, to take effect at once." He had not the slightest idea whether or not the law would back up an owner in any such radical step; but Tom was never one to hesitate on any such point as that. "Now, I am in supreme command, I guess, and you the passenger."

It was a comic opera situation in the face of an impending tragedy. What the result of the conflict of authority would have been, though, it was not hard to conjecture. In another moment, Tom would have been ingloriously hauled aboard the boat and restrained there by main force.

But even as the skipper raised his voice in an exasperated snarl to give the order, and Tom, true to his colors, was about to issue an exactly contrary command, an appealing cry from down the deck caused them both to halt and turn sharply around.

Toward them, stumbling and staggering across the slope of planking, came a ragged little oiler, his face ghastly with fright and smeared with blood, his clothes almost torn from his body.

"Gosh!" The skipper swore softly under his breath. "I thought every living soul was off."

It developed afterward that this man had been caught in the crash when the two ships collided in the fog, and had been knocked unconscious.

"It looks to me, captain," said Tom with a quiet smile, "as if we were both booked to stay behind."

The skipper made no answer in words, but taking a step or two forward, caught the injured oiler in his arms and flung him aboard the waiting boat. Then quickly loosing the falls, and watching for the most opportune moment, he let the overloaded craft down to the waves.

It struck the water with an awkward splash, careened a moment and threatened to crush itself against the side of the *Ess-bee*; then as the men caught desperately at their oars it righted and was borne out of danger.

"Give way, there!" the skipper shouted, megaphoning through his hands. "Give way!"

A chorus of farewells drifted back; the sailors bent to their stroke, and a moment later the boat had disappeared in the enveloping fog. The two men were left alone upon the doomed ship.

The skipper stood at the rail, straining his eyes after the departing boat. Then he turned back toward Tom.

"Captain Bradley," he said, "If you don't mind, I should like to shake hands with you. You have shown me that there is at least one owner who has red blood in his veins, and who—"

He halted abruptly and peered closer, an

expression of startled wonder on his weather-beaten face.

"Why, you are not Harry Bradley!" he gasped. "You are an impostor!"

A second or so he hesitated, then impulsively shot out his big fist.

"Anyhow, I want to shake hands with you," he said. "You are a brave man." And their fingers closed in a hearty grip.

They moved away from where they were standing and sought a more protected position. The fog still lay heavy all about them, shutting in the scene of the Essbee's death struggle as within the opaque walls of an amphitheatre. The sea beneath was as gray and smoky as the nebulous veil above, except where the hollows showed black and hungry between the rounded combers.

It was a desolate prospect—as desolate as a battle-field after the fighting is over, with the ground riven and bare of all vegetation, and the long lines of successive trenches for the burial of the dead.

There was no roar or racket of dashing waves, only an uncanny stillness and an oily swash as those big mountains of gray-green water slid past—a sort of a choking sob the sound was, with a murmurous undertone like the sighing of the wind through a churchyard on a rainy November evening.

The skipper broke the silence by snapping open the case of his watch.

"There's a chance—mind you, I don't want to raise any false hopes, but there's a chance if the old girl stays afloat just a little while longer that we may be picked up."

"Eh?" Tom, who had been absorbed in his own meditations, roused himself with a start.

"Yes," the other nodded, "the General Burnside and the Idano both got our position before the wireless failed, and signaled that they were standing by to render assistance. One or the other of them ought to be showing up pretty soon now."

He paused and hesitated a moment. "What are you wanted for?" he questioned clumsily.

Tom laughed.

"Name it anything you please, cap, and you can't well go wrong. The list runs all the way from murder to malaria. Why? Were you figuring on turning me over, and collecting a reward?"

The skipper gave him a disgusted look.

"Quit your kidding," he growled. "I was

only thinking it might be wise for me to know a little about the facts. If we're picked up, they're apt to be a bit curious as to who you are, and we don't want to be telling different stories, you know."

"Oh, I see." Tom's tone softened. "Let me tell you, you're 'some man' yourself, old top. However, you needn't be afraid that you'll have to strain your conscience very hard over me. To tell you the truth, my chief offense is that I am *persona non grata* to Harry Bradley."

The captain bent a quick glance at him, the light of a dawning comprehension in his keen eyes.

"Ah? I get you now." His face showed his relief. "You're that cut-up cousin of his. I couldn't figure somehow that you were a regular crook."

He broke suddenly into a booming burst of uncontrollable laughter.

"And to think," he chuckled, "that you walked right out of all the traps he had set for you, and actually made your getaway on one of his own boats—free passage at that."

Again his sides shook.

"But, say," he sobered abruptly, "you can't carry it off any further, young fellow. If you go to playing Captain Harry Bradley for a survivor of this voyage, you'll get shown up so quick that it'll make your hair curl."

"Never fear, cap, I had no intention of trying to pull anything so raw as that. Wait a minute," and Tom brightened with a sudden inspiration, "what were the names of those two men who had the stateroom next to mine? No. 15A it was."

The skipper thought a moment.

"Sure. I remember them," he nodded. "They were down for my table. One of them was S. Fenton on the list and the other T. J. Bates."

"Very well, then; one or the other of those names is the one I'll take."

"But, my boy, you can't do that. You're apt to run right into those men first dash out of the box."

"I shall not run into them," Tom spoke with a grim significance. "And, furthermore, as I have every reason to believe that the names upon the list were assumed, I am not expecting any trouble from the use of them. Fenton is the one I'll choose, I think. Yes; hereafter, captain, please remember that I am Mr. S. Fenton, a horse buyer, who—"

He paused, his quick imagination, as he took on this new rôle, leaping to a daring conception.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "That's an idea."

Under the stress of it his gaze roved meditatively away across the deck; then he came back to himself with a quick start.

"Say, captain," he exclaimed, "am I fooling myself, or is that list of the ship less than it was a while ago?"

The skipper gave a quick glance across to the farther rail; then strode away on a hurried trip of investigation.

"By ginger, you're right," he reported gleefully on his return.

"Whether it's a shifting of the cargo or whether another bulkhead has broken down and let water into the after hold, I can't tell; but certain it is that we've righted by more than a couple of feet. Who knows," he cried, "but what we may yet bring the old girl into port?"

But at that moment, as if in very mockery of his expert opinion, a mountainous wave swept down upon the *Essbee*. The water-logged vessel, failing to rise to it, wallowed overwhelmed in its trough, rolled heavily once or twice, and then, without further warning, took her long-expected plunge to the bottom.

CHAPTER XII.

SEIZING AN OPPORTUNITY.

"GOING down-n-n!"

The familiar phrase of the elevator boy was the one coherent thought amid all the wild jumble of impressions which Tom experienced as he was drawn into the whirling vortex of deep-green water created by the suction of the *Essbee*.

The bottom seemed to have dropped out of everything, the world to have dissolved itself into chaos. Cascades of water poured down upon him. He was buried under tons and tons of ocean, strangling, beaten, tossed about in it, powerless as a chip in a maelstrom.

And down, down, down he went as one falls in a nightmare for seeming miles without ever reaching bottom. His chest seemed about to burst, his skull to cave with the weight imposed upon him.

And then something happened. What it was Tom never knew. Perhaps the engines of the *Essbee* let go. Perhaps he was

caught in some reactionary current set up by the descent of the great vessel. At any rate he felt himself suddenly flung up as by the spouting of a great geyser, and swiftly as he had gone down he was shuttlecocked toward the surface, finally to emerge upon a sea boiling with wreckage.

He ducked a heavy timber which hurled itself at his head, swallowed an additional gallon or so of brine as an unexpected wave caught him with his mouth open, and then with drowning desperation clutched at a grating which went racing past, and for a space knew nothing more.

When he came to himself again, he was drifting easily on a sea which had quieted down, upheld by his cork jacket and his unrelaxed grip on the grating. A short distance away, was the captain anchored comfortably like himself to one of the hatches from his late command.

They swam toward each other.

"Well, what are the chances now?" hailed Tom cheerfully. "Our one hope lies, I suppose, in the *Idano* or the *Burnside*, unless some other ship happens to get a slant at us."

The skipper shook his head.

"No use buoying yourself up with any dreams like that, my boy," he retorted. "In a fog like this, they'd practically have to run over us before they'd know we were here. We haven't got a chance, I tell you; not a chance."

"I suppose fogs never lift, eh?" Tom refused to be dismayed. "Shucks, captain! What's the use of being a killjoy? We're not so worse off. The water's warm, and we can float around this way almost indefinitely."

But the loss of his ship seemed to have submerged the skipper in gloom.

"Little difference it makes to me anyhow, with the old *Essbee* gone," he growled. "What good is a master without a ship? And I'd have a hard time getting another berth, even if by a miracle I was to be saved. By George, if it wasn't for the little money I've got laid by I'd have to go to the poor-house."

Tom pricked up his ears.

"By Jove, cap, don't tell me that we're going down," he exclaimed excitedly. "Fate has thrown us out here together for a purpose; that's all there is to it. You're out of a job and with a little money to invest; I happen to know of a deal where we can pull off between \$40,000 and \$60,000 without

the slightest risk or chance of failure. It's fate, believe me.

"Now listen," he urged, "if I can show you that I've got just such a proposition as I describe how much of a bankroll do you suppose you could scrape together to finance it?"

The captain was cautious enough to have hailed direct from Jefferson City, Mo. He was neither of the temperament, nor in the humor just then to lend ear to any opulent fancies. However, after considerable hedging, he was at last led to admit that he could, with the aid of some sea captain friends, and for an absolutely safe enterprise, raise as much as \$30,000.

"Then the thing is as good as settled," jubilantly declared Tom. "And here's the lay-out. Through a peculiar chain of circumstances, I happen to know where there is hidden away a bunch of four hundred horses, which the British Government will jump at, paying a top notch price for them of anywhere from \$200 to \$250 apiece, while we can snag the whole lot at no more than \$75 apiece. Nobody else in the market has the slightest knowledge that such an opportunity even exists. It's my secret, and all we've got to do to realize on it, is simply to get the horses to St. Louis by July 20. We'll make a barrel of money out of it, and split fifty-fifty."

But even with this glowing exposition, the thing was not as good as settled yet with the captain—not by a jugful. He was interested, yes; but he made it plain that he was still a long, long way from anything like active co-operation.

Tom saw that to land him the stiffest kind of a selling argument would be required, and as always when a hint of opposition showed itself, he was roused to his best efforts. So for the next hour or more, while the two of them drifted about in the fog, rocking side by side in their cork jackets, he labored with all his arts of persuasion and cajolery.

The ordinary man would have been more concerned in making his peace with heaven. It was odds on that neither he nor the skipper would ever see the shore again. But, born salesman that he was, Tom hammered away at his points as earnestly and enthusiastically as if their rescue were merely a side issue, and the closing of this deal the one important thing.

Such devotion to a ruling passion could not fail. The captain finally surrendered.

"I'm plumb safe in making the promise, my boy; but if we're saved, I pledge you my word that you shall have the backing you want, and here's my hand on it.

"You've talked me deaf and dumb and blind," he grumbled quizzically, "and—no, by glory!" he suddenly raised a shout, "I have saved my eyesight. Look!"

Startled by the exclamation, Tom came back from the world of calculation in which he had been absorbed to a realization of his actual plight, shipwrecked, adrift, blanketed-from searching eyes by the enveloping fog.

Then, as he followed the captain's excited gaze, it dawned upon him that, all unnoticed by them in their engrossment, the fog had lifted and the sun was shining over the wide expanse of blue.

More than that, off against the horizon stood out the hulls of the two rescue steamers, the Idano and the Burnside, while nearer at hand their boats were busily scouring the surface in a hunt for survivors of the wreck. They were saved.

Nor did the bluff, old skipper forget the pledge he had given out there in the fog-wrapped ocean, when any hope of its fulfillment seemed about the slimmest chance on earth.

Faithfully he stood by his agreement, and since Tom was no worse for his immersion than would have been a healthy young bear cub, and haste was a prime essential in the enterprise, the next morning saw the two new-made partners bidding each other good-by at the railroad station in Norfolk as the younger started on his long journey to the Southwest.

"Now, remember," enjoined Tom, as he grasped the skipper's hairy paw, "in any communications you may make to me, I don't want to have a word except about the business in hand. I'm that way. You'll probably hear a lot about me, when you get back to New York, and you may think that some of it is important enough for me to be told. But don't you do it. For the next three weeks, I am going to concentrate wholly on this deal, and I don't want to have my mind led off, or diverted to any side issues. It will be time enough to tackle those things when I am ready to return."

He started toward the gate, and was about to pass through it, when he turned and came hurrying back.

"Just one more thing, captain," he

panted. "Don't neglect on any account to deliver that message I gave you last night for that little girl up on Madison Avenue. Everybody else must think that Tom Bradley is food for the fishes; but I want her to know the truth. You've got the name and address O. K., eh? Miss Muriel Stockton, 129 Madison Avenue? All right, then. So long."

And off he dashed, just in time to catch the railing of the last car and swing himself aboard as his train pulled out of the station.

The skipper stood gazing after him a trifle dazedly. His sensations were somewhat akin to those of a man abruptly released from a flywheel of high velocity on which he has been dizzily swinging around and around for several hours. It would take him some little time to get his bearings again, and recover his lost equilibrium.

Slowly he made his way with his rolling sea gait up the street to the local offices of his line, and then paused, aghast, at the sight of a bulletin which was pasted in the window.

"Gee!" his startled thoughts took shape as he read it. "I suppose I had better wire this to that young fellow right away. He ought to know about it."

Then he shook his head.

"No," he recalled; "he told me not to bother him with any outside matters, no matter how important, and I am going to obey orders. Anyhow," he added with a salving of his conscience, "my wiring or not wiring won't cut any figure. He's bound to see the thing in the newspapers, and he can decide for himself whether or not he wants to come back."

The bulletin which so perturbed the captain was a brief telegram from New York, announcing that Captain Harry Bradley had been found dead in his private office with a bullet through his heart.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BOOB FROM BROADWAY.

IT was a fair assumption of the old skipper's that Tom would learn of his cousin's demise through the press dispatches of the day; but it proved to be mistaken.

In the Middle West toward which the junior partner of the enterprise was speeding, the death of Captain Harry Bradley

was of less sensational moment than in either New York or Norfolk, and the Cincinnati paper which was the first one Tom took an opportunity to look at contained but a brief mention of the occurrence, a scant paragraph or two which the Easterner in his unfamiliarity with the make-up of the sheet completely overlooked.

It was the same thing, too, with the St. Louis papers, when he came to glance over them, only more so. A big municipal scandal happened to have broken loose in the Mound City which so filled up the available space that any reference to this purely extraneous tragedy was crowded out altogether.

And after that, of course, owing both to the lapse of time and distance, the chances of seeing anything relating to the affair became steadily less and less.

Probably, if Mr. Thomas G. Bradley had been traveling under his own name and style, some of the acquaintances he made on railroad trains or around the hotels and restaurants would have said something to give him a hint of what had happened, but with "Mr. S. Fenton," no one, not even those who knew about it, thought of raising the subject.

Accordingly, he went his way in utter ignorance of the decease of the man whose vindictive pursuit of him had been chiefly responsible for all his troubles—in utter ignorance, too, of the position in which that decease had placed the little country girl from Dutchess County.

As to the experiences which he encountered on that long Western journey, the various difficulties in which he became involved, and the ingenious ways in which he extricated himself from them, a book could be written; but as none of these proved of any lasting consequence, they may perhaps be left to the imagination.

He himself regarded the trip as practically without incident, rather monotonously uneventful in fact; but then it must be remembered that as a connoisseur of thrills he had practically graduated into the professional class. A schoolgirl and the stunt-artist of a moving picture company have different ideas as to what constitutes real excitement.

Dropping off at St. Louis with the idea of interviewing the British inspection officers between trains, and getting a few details in regard to the contract he had so jauntily started out to fill, he discovered

to his dismay that the men he sought were not standing around in hotel lobbies waiting to be hailed by any chance stranger. On the contrary, he found dealers and agents who had been kicking their heels around the city for weeks without even coming to know the inspectors by sight.

"So?" he muttered. "Well, if Mahomet can't go to the mountain, then the mountain must come to Mahomet." And he proceeded to accomplish this by wrapping himself in an air of mystery and pretending to be an emissary of Germany.

The ruse worked. The British officers very promptly hunted him up, and when he had convinced them that he was devoid of hostile designs, were sportsmen enough to acknowledge the joke upon themselves and to give him all the information he desired.

But before this happy result was attained, it must be confessed that Tom's dramatic sense led him into some rather serious complications, not the least of which was his narrow escape from arrest on the suspicion of being a well-known international swindler and confidence man.

Again, down in New Mexico he went through a rather baffling and annoying set of experiences in trying to locate his destination. All he knew of course from the conversation he had overheard on the Ess-bee was the name of the ranch where the horses were to be found, and he had started off with no other information, rashly expecting to be guided by inquiring his way.

But no one to whom he applied seemed able to help him. When he asked the way to Cherrichuppa Ranch, people looked at him as if he were demanding directions to Merlin's cave, or the fabled castle of Otranto, and gruffly replied that they had never heard of such a place.

Wildly Tom followed up various clues and suggestions, only to have them end in failure. Could it be, he asked himself, that he had heard the name wrong, or that the two-horse dealers had given it incorrectly in their discussion. It might even be in another State, for all he could say.

Time was passing rapidly, yet nowhere could he gain the slightest inkling to aid him in his quest. It was maddening intolerable to be balked by such an obstacle as this, when everything else had gone so swimmingly.

And then one morning as he sat at breakfast in a railroad eatinghouse, and in the

easy, Western way fell into conversation with the man who occupied the next stool, he happened to mention the disheartening search upon which he was engaged.

"Cherrichuppa Ranch?" His companion gave a start. "Oh, you mean the Bar 7 X outfit down El Paso way. That's what you ought to have asked for, and then anybody could have told you where to find it. Old man Salinger's the boss of it."

His informant was a one-eyed cattleman of distinctly sinister appearance, and atrocious table manners; yet so great was Tom's gratitude and relief that he felt like clasping the fellow to his bosom.

In the exuberance of his spirits, he dropped an indiscreet remark which led to some questioning by his new-found friend, and finally into Tom's giving the latter his full confidence.

"So, you're after a bunch of old Salinger's horses, eh?" he drawled commiseratingly. "Well, now, ain't that too bad? He sold off every last, li'l, old horse he had to a friend of mine only last week."

Tom never knew what kept him from fainting at the news. The world seemed to reel wildly around him and the stars to shoot from their orbits.

A great wave of sick chagrin swept over his soul. Only last week, eh? A few brief days had made all the difference between success and failure. While he was vainly seeking for the ranch with the unknown name, another had stepped in and had bagged the prize. It was a pure case of the malignity of Fate.

As he sat there overwhelmed and dejected, his companion finished shoveling the last huge knife-ful of beans from his plate into his mouth, sopped up a remaining vestige of pork gravy with a bit of bread, and wiping his walrus-like mustache with the back of his hand, leaned over toward Tom.

"Come outside when you're through eatin', pardner," he whispered. "I got somethin' I want to talk to you about."

Hurriedly Tom pushed back his plate—all appetite for food had deserted him—and climbing down from his tall stool, he followed in the other's wake.

The cattleman led him down the platform and around the corner of a box-car before he spoke. Then, when satisfied at last that they were alone, with no chance of being overheard, he hooked a grimy finger in the New Yorker's buttonhole.

"Now, look here," he confided, "I can

see you're some cut up over losing out with them horses, and I'm going to hunt up that friend of mine and see if I can't do something' to try and straighten the trouble out."

On East, the first question to arise in Tom's mind would have been: And where do you come in? But since he had been out West he had found every one so ready to go out of the way to do him a favor that he had almost forgotten the habit of suspicion.

"Before I pitch in, though," the philanthropist continued, "I'd have to know just how much of a bankroll you've got, 'cause my friend is that kind of a feller. He does business right off the reel, or not at all."

Tom hesitated not a second. His one chance to snatch victory out of the defeat which had overtaken him seemed to be through the good offices of this chance acquaintance. The fellow's unsavory appearance, he told himself, should not count against him; some of the most responsible and capable men he had met out here had shown up to very little better advantage.

"I've got thirty thousand dollars," he therefore answered without a pause.

The cattleman wrinkled his brow a trifle dubiously.

"And how many horses was you expectin' to buy with that wad of change?" he inquired. "About four hundred, eh? You're sure you couldn't sweeten that roll none?"

"Not a cent," Tom assured him humbly. "Thirty thousand is absolutely my limit."

The other considered, meditatively cocking his single eye off toward the horizon.

"Well, I'll see what can be did," he finally promised. "Mebbe I can persuade Jack to do it as a personal favor to me. But it'll have to be a cash deal, mind you. He's awful particular that way."

"I'll tell you," he suggested, "you go on up to Santa Fe and draw your money—better get it in five-hundred-dollar bills—and meet me here to-morrow. Meantime, I'll see Jack, and if everything's all right I'll bring the two of you together. But don't say a word to a livin' soul, or else it's liable to get back to him, and kill the whole deal."

So Tom, with hope once more rekindled, hurried off to Santa Fe, and having sedulously obeyed instructions, was back the next day at the rendezvous, impatiently awaiting his intermediary.

The latter shortly appeared, and having been assured that the money was on

hand, enthusiastically announced that his friend had been induced to consent to the bargain.

"You'll have to go out on the range to close with him, though," the one-eyed man advised. "He's turruble busy just now, and he couldn't no ways fix it to come in for no such little chickenfeed deal like this."

Tom, overjoyed at the favorable report, was in no mood to raise objection to anything, and accordingly the two set out. They journeyed by rail to a point well down toward the Mexican border, and then taking horse, rode out a considerable distance across the range.

By nightfall they came to a little thicket not more than five or six miles from the river, and here after an amount of reconnoitering, which seemed to Tom wholly unnecessary, the cattleman ordered a halt.

"We'll lay up here, and wait for Jack to come along," he said. "He's liable to show up 'most any time now."

As a matter of fact it was well on toward two o'clock before the thudding of hoofs announced the approach of the friend with his cavalcade. He was a villainous looking Mexican, so evil in appearance that by comparison the one-eyed cattleman might have stood for an angel of light.

Still, there seemed nothing to question in the situation. The horses were all there—a full four hundred of them—and although they were sweating and looked hard-driven, they were evidently of the class acceptably to fill the British order.

Tom, after giving them an inspection, unhesitatingly paid over the purchase price, and the Mexican having agreed to loan him the use of a couple of his men to help get the stock down to El Paso, the party retired to their blankets for the remainder of the night.

With the long strain of doubt and anxiety removed from his shoulders, and after the fatigues of the day, Tom naturally slept soundly. When he awoke, the sun was high in the heavens and the picketed and roped horses were grazing at a little distance; but not a sign of his late companions was anywhere to be seen. The cattleman, the Mexican, and the silent fellows who had accompanied the latter were all gone.

Blinking and staring, Tom struggled up on one shoulder trying to understand the reason for this desertion, when his ear

caught the sound of hard galloping off across the range, and he turned quickly in that direction, expecting to see the return of his missing camp-fellows.

But he was speedily undeceived when he found himself surrounded by a party of stern-faced ranch owners and managers, with Salinger of the Bar 7 X outfit at the head of them.

There had been a good deal of rustling of late, it seemed, by stock-thieves who were running large bunches of horses and cattle across the border to supply the Mexican revolutionaries, and these men had banded together in the old way to put a stop to such depredations.

Furthermore, they had determined among themselves to make a wholesome example of the first rustler they caught, and here was one apparently taken red handed.

It did not take Tom long to realize that he was in just about the most precarious plight of his young life, and he talked as he had never talked before in the effort to convince his captors of his innocence.

Such, too, was his magnetism and the forcefulness of the argument he put up that he might have won the day. He was telling them nothing but the truth, and the truth has a way of carrying conviction.

But suddenly some one—one of those officious personages always present in every assembly—suggested that he be searched; and when his person was gone over, there was found down in his vest pocket the false mustache he had bought that morning on Fourteenth Street on his way back from Blair's office.

"Ah!" The ranch owners looked at him blackly. "Carrying a disguise, eh?"

It turned the scale against him.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEMESIS!

ALL this time events had been happening in New York.

Events have a way of doing that in the Big Town. You can leave a hen sitting on a bunch of eggs and go away with the reasonable certainty that if you come back inside of three weeks you will find her in exactly the same place.

But let no one imagine that he can go away from New York for three weeks and come back to find conditions unchanged. They hatch 'em there while you wait.

Had Tom known all that was afoot nothing on earth could have kept him down there in the Southwest, hunting for an apparently mythical ranch and getting into association with cattle rustlers.

But Tom, alas! did not know. He had cut his cables too thoroughly behind him.

Of course, he had an avenue of direct communication in his partner, the captain; but the captain was one of those annoying and unimaginative persons who obey instructions precisely and to the letter.

Tom had told him that in order to concentrate on his mission he did not want to be upset by any news or tidings as to what was taking place back East; and the captain regarded that as an explicit order.

Why, then, it may be asked, did not Muriel supply the withheld information?

The reason is simple. Muriel had no knowledge as to Tom's whereabouts. Until one has had a chance to check over the account of the Recording Angel it is not safe to predicate in regard to the ultimate destination of any disembodied shade; and it was in this category that the country girl now classed the lover who had burst meteor-like into her uneventful life, glowed upon her for a moment, and then, as she supposed, had swept on into darkness and infinite space.

Minus the tombstone and the grass-grown mound, that mental picture Tom had once called up of Muriel weeping over his grave was not far wrong. Only it was not in a cemetery, but in the privacy of her own room that she let her tears fall.

Outside she held up gallantly; but she went sobered and saddened. The roses faded in her cheeks, and she wore a pathetic little knot of black at her throat as a tribute to his memory.

Again, it was the captain and his slavish regard for orders that was to blame. Tom had told him to give assurance of his safety to Miss Muriel Stockton of 129 Madison avenue; but when the captain applied there he was rather curtly advised that Miss Stockton was no longer stopping there and had left no address.

That settled it with the captain. He had obeyed instructions, had done exactly as he was bid. What more could be asked of him? It was not his fault that he had failed to find the girl. If he had known where to look for her he would have done so; but as it was, one might as well go hunting a needle in a haystack.

Afterward, when circumstances rather sensationally located her for him, he hesitated. The big deal was right at the ticklish point, and Tom needed all his powers of concentration to put it over. If he should tell what he knew now, the girl might insist on being put into communication with her lover, and so unsettle him that everything would go to pot, including the skipper's own prospective profits.

In any choice of decision where the pocketbook is concerned one can always find plenty of justification to go with the money end of it; so now the captain played safe and held his peace.

He told himself rather weakly that he could not be sure this was the same girl to whom he had been given the message; in New York there might readily be two Muriel Stocktons, or even a dozen of them, and only the right Muriel, of all the people in the world, so his instructions ran, was to know that Tom Bradley was still in the land of the living.

The girl's departure from the boarding-house where Harry Bradley had placed her, it must be confessed, was rather precipitate. Really, it was no wonder that such a select establishment referred to her rather curtly when persons called to inquire for her whereabouts.

The morning after Tom's departure, after she had arisen and finished dressing, she happened to glance from her window, and there she saw ascending the stoop a figure which caused her to start and stare with a touch of incredulous horror.

There was no mistaking that burly figure, nor could one well believe it a wraith meandering along Madison Avenue in the clear morning sunlight. It was Horgan beyond a doubt, and a Horgan, too, that was obviously in the flesh; yet how it could be in view of the circumstantial report they had heard of his death, she was at a loss to understand.

Later, when she got a newspaper and read in it the account of a policeman named Dorgan having been set upon by a couple of thugs and beaten to death, she comprehended the natural error into which their informant had fallen; but at the moment she was overwhelmed with bewilderment.

Her bewilderment, however, quickly gave way to a sense of personal apprehension. The detective was coming there to the house, and for what possible purpose except to take her into custody?

As a matter of fact, he was simply coming there to ask her a few questions; but in view of his vindictive threats, she could see nothing but visions of a prison cell. All at once she felt lost and lonely in New York without Tom to guide and direct her.

In a panic, she fled to a closet and hid there, heedless to the knocking of the maid at her door, until it ceased. Then when she was satisfied that Horgan must have gone away, she stole out of the house with her suit-case, never even stopping for breakfast, and sought new quarters.

"If Tom was here now, and knew that there was no 'murder' charge against him," she reflected with a little whimsical smile, "he'd immediately see an end to all his troubles. But to me, it seems as if mine were only beginning."

She had mailed to the officers of the Bradley estate the night before a written resignation of her position with them, and this morning she was prepared to take her new place at the dressmaking establishment in the same building.

But when she arrived there she found the demeanor of the woman in charge entirely changed from what it had been the previous day. She had reconsidered, the proprietress said, and had decided that a person of experience would be more suited to her needs. Nor was there any other position, even of the humblest, that she had to offer at present.

Muriel noted that the dressmaker was strangely uneasy and distraught throughout the interview, and as she was leaving her sharp ears heard the woman say to an assistant:

"I felt like a cur turning down that young thing, but what else could I do? Harry Bradley let me know that if I gave her employment I'd have to get out of the building."

With burning cheeks and head up, Muriel marched straight down the stairs and into the office of the Bradley estate. They told her that it would be impossible for her to see the chief that morning, as word had been received that one of the Bradley vessels was in distress and he was busily engaged in trying to get further particulars. But when she insisted on having her name sent in, the message came quickly back that she was to be admitted.

"Captain Bradley," she demanded defiantly of him, "why are you trying to keep me from securing honest employment?"

His eyes narrowed for a moment; then he swept the papers and telegrams he was examining back from in front of him and rose to his feet.

"Because I have other plans for you, little girl," he said softly. "Listen," stepping around the table toward her. "I am making arrangements to go on a long trip. My yacht is ready now, and in commission. I am intending to cruise for many months through summer seas and to far off islands. But I don't want to go alone, Muriel. Is there any need to say more, dear? Don't you understand?"

He leaned forward and passed his arm about her waist as if to draw her to him; then recoiled with a sharp exclamation, his cheek reddening from a good old Dutchess county slap. As he gathered himself together the girl swept out of his office and was gone.

That stinging rebuff from the little country girl—a source of deep chagrin to him who had always deemed himself irresistible with women—seemed to mark the beginning of a chain of disasters for Captain Harry.

Hardly had he had time to recover from it before definite word came in, confirming the early rumors of a catastrophe to the Essbee, and it was not long until they knew that the company would have to sustain a total loss. It was a heavy blow, coming just as it did, for Captain Bradley had been speculating much more deeply than anybody knew, and had been almost invariably on the wrong side of the market.

In the effort to recoup from so crushing a calamity, he now sent out hurried orders to his brokers for a series of ventures which were in effect nothing more than reckless plunging.

In the phraseology of the gambling table, he started to "buck his luck," and as is almost invariably the case his effort failed. Everything he tackled went wrong, his judgment seemed utterly at sea, he did not dare at the close of the day's business to figure up his losses, so enormous had they been.

And then, to top off, like lightning from a clear sky, came the notification to him that the probating of Moses Blair's estate which he had expected to go through as on greased ways, had been halted, and that the pliant tool whom he had picked for the place would in all probability not be appointed administrator.

"In Heaven's name," he demanded furiously, "where did Tom get a lawyer to do all that? Some shyster, of course?"

"No," he was told; "it's Hector Darn-ton, a young attorney from up in Dutchess County. He's a nephew of the Surrogate's."

Harry paled.

"A young attorney from up in Dutchess County, out to make a reputation," he thought. "That means he can neither be bribed nor bought off. And a nephew of the Surrogate's! He knows that no crooked work of any kind can be played against him."

The hard-pressed millionaire thrust his fingers wildly up through his gray hair and gnawed uncertainly at his lower lip.

Within a few days this ambitious young attorney would be in possession of all the effects of Moses Blair, and of all the papers and documents now sealed inside his office safe.

And Harry Bradley knew only too well what reposed in an envelope marked "Bradley Case," inside that safe. It was a letter which Blair had managed to unearth—an old, yellowed letter from Harry's father, Henry Bradley, to Tom's father, Thomas, which fully established every contention that the claimant to the estate was making.

Harry knew it was there, because Blair had showed it to him and had suggested that in order to avoid litigation they agree upon a compromise. They were to have their final interview upon the subject the very day that Fate had led the lawyer across the crowded street directly in the path of Captain Harry's car.

A swift vision of that accident rose to Captain Harry's memory.

"I had nothing to do with it!" He started up wildly, as if some one had actually voiced the charge to him, and he was driven to make defense. "I was not driving the car."

He was all alone. He had dismissed his stenographer some time before in order to give himself a chance to think. Now he pressed a buzzer on the edge of his desk, and when the boy appeared, gave a curt order.

"I am not to be disturbed on any account, or for any purpose. If anybody calls, I am out; and don't let me be annoyed with the phone."

With the departure of the boy, he settled back in his chair again and tried to absorb

himself in his muddled financial affairs; but in spite of himself his mind kept reverting to that tragedy in the middle of the crowded down-town street.

Leaning back from his flat-topped desk, he sat with his eyes fixedly gazing into vacancy, and every once in a while he would mutter defensively:

"I had nothing to do with it; I was not driving the car."

So an hour, or two, or three slipped by. The clerks outside had gone home, the offices were deserted. He rose and took a turn out through the place which he had ruled so autocratically. How would it feel, he wondered, to go out of there—stripped, and bare, and humiliated?

He retreated to his private room once more and locked himself in. Here the shadows were deepening with the falling of dusk, and suddenly it seemed to him as if they eddied and drifted into shape—into an effigy of Moses Blair which stood and pointed an accusing finger at him.

"I had nothing to do with it, I tell you!" he recoiled. "I was not driving the car."

"Ah!" Did a voice speak, or was it simply his own conscience? "But you could have halted the chauffeur. For a second there you had the choice of action, and you deliberately withheld your hand. You are guilty of malicious and premeditated murder."

The shadowy figure seemed slowly to advance upon him and as it came on he gave way shrinkingly before it.

Clear around the desk he retreated; then with a sudden sharp cry and an impulsive movement jerked open a drawer, and snatching out a loaded revolver shot himself through the heart.

CHAPTER XV.

A NEW AMBITION.

THE first sensation caused by the news of Captain Bradley's suicide had hardly died down before another arose in the question as to who would inherit the great Bradley estate.

No will could be found, and no one could be discovered who knew of the dead millionaire ever having executed one. As a matter of fact, it was something that he had put off attending to, like many another man who has no immediate family claims upon him, and some who have.

When it became definitely settled that no will was left, there was weeping and gnashing of teeth in the offices of various charitable and philanthropic associations, art museums, and the like, all of which had been promised large bequests.

In the absence of direct heirs, the fortune would have to pass to the nearest of kin, and in this case to a cousin, one Thomas G. Bradley, whom people with a shake of the head recalled was a notorious spendthrift.

And then the third sensation began to leak out. Tom was not the only spendthrift in the family, it was revealed; and the charitable and philanthropic associations began to chirk up with the realization that there was nothing much left to gnash their teeth over.

The Bradley estate was in short a shell. Captain Harry had for years been wasting the solid substance of his patrimony in almost every kind of reckless venture.

Still even the shell to such a magnificent structure was not to be sneezed at, and presently people began to question and to wonder why the heir at law did not put in his appearance. What on earth has become of Tom Bradley? The inquiry started to go around, and no one seemed able to answer.

Then from various quarters the suggestion began to come that he had been on the ill-fated Essbee, and since he had not been saved, the natural conclusion was that he must have been lost.

Again surmise and inquiry broke out with redoubled interest. If Tom Bradley was dead, to whom, then would go the Bradley estate, or rather, that remnant of it left after Captain Harry's wild plunging?

Genealogies began to be searched over, and possible claimants pricked up their ears. Not in years had the family Bible been in such general demand.

And then the police court clerk ended the discussion and squashed the hopes of a growing army of Bradleys—spelled all the way from "Bradlie" to "Bradleigh"—by confiding to a reporter friend that Tom Bradley had left a will bequeathing all of which he died possessed to his fiancée, Miss Muriel Stockton.

The old skipper might not have been able to locate Muriel; but it was a different thing when a pack of alert young newspaper men with a romantic story like that in sight started on her trail.

Inside of twenty-four hours she found herself famous, with her picture on the front page of every newspaper.

Yet the notoriety and the adulation did not serve to turn her head. She remained the same shy, sweet, sensible girl who had come down from Dutchess County with Tom Bradley on the maddest escapade of all his mad career, simply because she loved him.

And she loved him still. Somehow she could not think of him as dead. She knew it must be so, and to this knowledge paid the tribute of her tears; but to her heart he was a living, breathing personality, and it refused to grieve for him. She was always half-expecting to see him come in at the door.

With her establishment as the heir to his estate, she took up the business of looking after it as the serious interest of her life, and having secured the appointment of Hector Darnton as executor, made him set to work with her to straighten out the tangle due to Captain Harry's mismanagement.

Day after day, she went down to the office where she had slapped him across the face, and seated there at his big desk, sought to familiarize herself with all the complex details of the business.

One of the first things she insisted on doing was to clear away every ugly blemish that rested on Tom's memory. The road-house man was forced to accept payment for his bad check, the charges which Captain Harry had laid were withdrawn.

She went personally to old Jasper Cummins, and laying five hundred dollars before him, asked that he destroy all evidence relating to the bottle-stopper transaction.

"Destroy it?" The old man laughed in her face. "Well, I guess not. Why, that promises to be one of the best things I ever got into in my life."

"But you're wrong, Mr. Cummins," she persisted. "It was a flim-flam deal they worked on you. This man Grosvenor, who claimed to be the inventor, is a crook and an ex-convict."

"All right. Let him be anything he wants to. I tell you, though, he's got one of the cleverest devices in the country, and one that's going to make a barrel of money for everybody concerned. And don't you think for a minute, my dear girl, that I was flim-flammed in any way, or that I would take your five hundred dollars if I was. When-

ever anybody flim-flams J. Cummins, they're welcome to all they can get away with.

"No, my dear," he concluded, "if you're the heir to that estate, you take my advice and hug tight to the bottle-stopper. It'll be grinding out good money for you long after some of your high-priced investments have gone to the boneyard."

So the slate at last stood clean, and Muriel felt that she could devote her whole attention to the management of the estate. She started out with the idea that she would not sell any of the holdings. Her policy was rather to build up and improve, then to let go.

As they probed deeper and deeper into the tangled condition of affairs, though, it became plain to both her and Darnton that in order to keep certain things going they would have to dispose of some of the less valuable property in order to get ready money, and after some discussion, it was decided that the New Mexican range should be sacrificed.

Accordingly she and the lawyer started for the Southwest, and a week later as they were riding to Cherrichuppa Ranch happened to gallop right into a session of the court of Judge Lynch.

One of the ranchers came hurriedly out to meet them.

"Better take your lady off a piece," he advised Darnton. "We're just goin' to string up a rustler that we've been trying and found guilty; and women-folks don't generally care for such sights."

At that moment the prisoner stood up, and Muriel, catching sight of him, gave a startled cry and lashed her pony forward into a run.

"Tom! Tom!" she screamed. "What on earth have you been doing now?"

Heedless of the dignity of the court, she flung herself from the saddle, and a moment later was clasping him in her arms.

"Tell me what you have been doing?" she demanded.

"Well, they've got me charged with stealing horses, and as they've caught me with the goods, I guess they are going to hang me. But honest, Muriel, it's only another case of my cursed luck."

"But whose horses were they?" she questioned, turning to the circle of hostile faces that glowered at the interruption. "Where is the man that owns them?"

"I do, lady." The old ranchman stood

forward. "My name's Salinger, and the horses he was rustling came from Cherrichuppa Ranch."

"Salinger?" she gasped. "Cherrichuppa Ranch? Why, you don't own those horses. They belong to the Bradley Estate. You are only the manager."

"Well, that's so, lady," Salinger confessed hesitatingly, "although we don't like to have the fact generally known. It makes a prejudice against a place to have it owned by one of them big Eastern corporations. And I don't see that it makes no difference to this rustler nohow. Stealin' 'is stealin', no matter who you steal from."

"Not in this case," she rejoined sharply, "for as it happens the owner of the Bradley estate is the man you are just about to hang."

"Oh, Tom, Tom!" she broke into half-hysterical laughter. "Who else but you could have got yourself into such a box. They were going to hang you for stealing your own horses."

Of course, there was no further question of holding an execution. Tom returned to luncheon with the man who had been about to officiate as Jack Ketch in his behalf, and

that afternoon he and Muriel again sat in a hammock—a hammock swung between two jack pines instead of weeping willows, and with the Sierra Madre etched against the background instead of the Highlands of the Hudson. But it was a scene just as well suited to love-making as the one far off in Dutchess County.

Of course, too, it took a long time for the mutual explanations to be made, broken as they were by constant interruptions and questionings; but at last Tom had a pretty comprehensive idea of the situation.

Darnton came along at that minute.

"Well, Mr. Bradley," he asked, "now that you know how everything stands, what are you going to do?"

"Do?" cried Tom eagerly. "Why, I am going back there to help you and Muriel put the Bradley estate on its feet again, and then I am going to pitch in as my father did before me and make it bigger and greater and—"

"Castles in the air again, Tom?" Muriel smiled.

"No," he shook his head. "For you'll be building them with me, and that will make them Castles in Heaven."

THE END.

ON FOOT

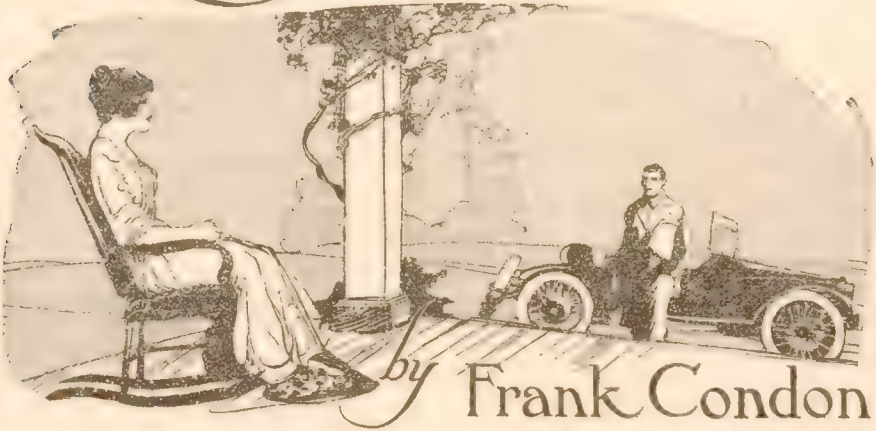
SIR GOLD goes by in his motor-car,
I tramp the road and take his dust;
But a friendly wind from the hills afar
Sweeps it away with a laughing-gust.
Sir Gold may ride, if he wills it so,
But let me follow the winding way
That leads to the hills and the streams I know,
Where the birches bend and the fishes play.

He has not seen in the sheltered nook
The windflower swing on the threadlike stalk.
He never knows how the fern fronds look,
Nor listens to jack-in-the-pulpit's talk.
And where the oriole's nest is swung,
A web of dreams against the sky—
Precious and sweet with her eager young—
Blind and stupid he rushes by.

Well, let him go if he likes the pace,
So long as he leaves the road behind!
In spite of his speed he has lost the race,
The tingling zest the foot-wise find.
Ho! Ho! I laugh at his sorry flight,
A speeding slave, when he might be free
In God's green weather of sweet delight,
On the good brown road, atramp with me.

George Edward Day.

An Appendix and a Carbureter



APPENDICITIS properly belongs in the A's. There can be no doubt about that. It begins with A, of course, and ends with S, or, in other words, \$. It is a fashionable illness, intimately connected with expensive operations, trips to swell watering resorts, private sanatoriums, French poodles, limousine motor-cars and bulletins signed by specialists of national repute, who write their names one under the other

in this
manner.

Appendicitis, belonging in the A family, is naturally associated with those who are Affluent, Aristocratic and Arrogant. Now and then an ordinary American citizen with twelve dollars in the savings bank falls heir to an attack of appendicitis; whereupon a matter-of-fact hospital surgeon with cigarette stains on his fingers, skilfully separates the citizen from his vermiform annoyance and remarks to the patient, when he can talk again, that life in a hospital is a horrible bore.

Teronne Metcalf was an ordinary young woman and an orphan, who never had a bank account, large or small, and who had worked for three years in the Sinclair store. She was tall and good-natured, and her

eyes were dark-brown, with a flash of blue and the merest trace of gray.

She sold French lingerie to young women who could not afford it, and fat, elderly ladies who no longer could afford not to afford it. She often wondered, as she stood upon weary feet behind her piled-up counter, how some people could be as wealthy as Mr. Sinclair, her employer, and others so poor as Teronne Metcalf herself. Not finding an answer, she worked on cheerfully, and the other girls openly admired her unflinching good humor.

Then Mr. P. Appendicitis came hurrying into the store one spring morning, paused before the French lingerie department and remarked to Teronne that she was wanted at the hospital. It was one of those sudden attacks. The ambulance backed up to a side entrance and Teronne was carried out by two uniformed young men from the hospital, one of whom had nice eyes and told her not to worry.

And two days later Teronne opened her eyes and realized that, no matter how long she lived in this world, she would never again walk down Broadway in full possession of her appendix. She was as absolutely appendixless as McGuffey's First Reader.

"My Lord!" remarked Teronne to the

smiling nurse; "is it all over? If it is, how do I feel?"

"I hope you feel well," returned the nurse. "You will be all right in a few days. But you must remain perfectly quiet."

"I got you," said Teronne faintly. "This is the first time in six years that any one told me to keep quiet."

The girls from Sinclair's sent flowers in white tissue paper, and rosy red apples, which the nurses divided with complete impartiality among themselves, and which would have killed Teronne right speedily. Mr. Sinclair broke the store rule long enough to send a check covering the hospital bill, and the floor-walker conveyed to the patient a copy of "Omar Khayyam" in limp leather.

And for many days Teronne lay blissfully, dreamily, in a soft white bed and pretended that she was a neutral princess in a castle by the sea.

"Pretty soft for little me," she confided to the nurse, referring not to her bed, which was soft enough, but to her state of restfulness and freedom from daily toil. "If I had enough appendixes I might have a vacation or so every six months. Next time I think I'll have typhoid. What can you have that will keep you here longest?"

The nurse laughed.

"You will be glad enough to go to work before this is over," she said. "You will long for work."

"If I do, it'll be the first time I longed for work. Did you ever try clerking in a department store? Or stoking an ocean liner in summer? They're exactly alike. Anyhow, I might as well know now as any time. How long before I have to go back to the job?"

"Six weeks," returned the nurse, "or two months; perhaps three months. It depends largely upon how you progress."

"Three months!" Teronne laughed. "Somebody must have told you it was easy to kid me. How d'ye suppose I'm going to keep on eating if I don't work for three months? I know you're not expected to have appendicitis unless you own money in the bank, but in my case they made a mistake. I'm going back to the store as soon as I leave this blessed bed. I'm one of those poor but honest working girls, nursie, dear."

"You want to go on living, don't you?" asked the white-clad one.

"Sometimes," smiled Teronne.

"Then you will have to follow the doctor's orders. You will have to remain quiet, because walking is extremely bad for the place where removed appendixes used to be. And if you insist upon walking before the doctor says you may, you are liable to walk right off this earth into the land of Kingdom Come."

"All right," Teronne agreed. "But I don't see how I am going to do it. Why, right this minute my room rent is due and I'm not even occupying the place."

Subsequent events proved that the nurse knew whereof she spake. Some persons, upon recovering from an operation on the appendix, are able to walk about very soon, carry handbags into town and open railway car windows. Others must remain totally quiescent. They must not walk any farther than you can throw a bull by the tail.

And the doctor informed Teronne that she must sit in a chair for many days. She must not return to Sinclair's. She must go somewhere into the country and recuperate.

"A pretty girl like you ought to have plenty of relations who would be glad to care for her," remarked the doctor, who was rather young and still able to note the difference between women. "Haven't you somebody out in the country, where you can get some fresh air?"

"I have an aunt in Connecticut," Teronne admitted ruefully. "She's as tight as the hoops on a barrel. Still, she couldn't mind my taking some of her fresh air and using it, could she? And she will probably think that if I had appendicitis I must have got it by going around in bad company. Anyhow, she's the only aunt I have. Suppose I write her?"

"I'll write her," replied the doctor.

Next morning he appeared before Teronne, with a telegram in his hand, announcing that Teronne's Aunt Martha was coming to New York instantly. The telegram was full of short words demanding to know why somebody had not informed her of her beloved niece's serious illness. In the afternoon Aunt Martha burst in upon them and threatened to embrace the patient, in spite of the doctor's protest.

So it came about that Teronne Metcalf took a motor ride, in a machine furnished kindly by the Sinclair store—Mr. Sinclair's own limousine—and accompanied by Aunt Martha. In due time they arrived at the old-fashioned home on the side of a Connecticut hill, a mile or two west of the

town of Weatherby. The motor-car departed for New York, and Teronne sat in a rocking-chair on the ancient veranda and sniffed the country odors.

"This is great," she observed as Aunt Martha brought her a cup of tea and Connecticut biscuits, which are different from any other biscuits.

If you have ever traveled between New York and New Haven in a motor-car, you are aware that the State road is a most excellent thoroughfare. It is as smooth as the proverbial billiard table and a constant line of scooting automobiles hum up the gentle rises and down the inclines.

Contemplating the steady stream of machines, even a New York girl might have found mental stimulus and freedom from loneliness, but it happened that Aunt Martha's home was not on the State road. It nestled in the curve of a hill a mile distant and was reached by a winding, narrow country lane, traversed only by an occasional farmer's cart, a stray dog or a contemplative and missionless cow.

"How in Heaven's name did you come to buy this house?" Teronne demanded of Aunt Martha, not in a spirit of captious criticism, but in simple wonderment.

"This was once the home of General Thomas B. Plimsoll," Martha returned with pride. "I took it because of its historic associations. That very chair in which you sit is a hundred years old, and the house itself was built in eighteen hundred and one. You New Yorkers have no reverence for antiques, I fear."

"Oh, yes we have," Teronne answered vaguely. "I'm nutty about antiques myself. We have a floor-walker in our store with whiskers—"

But Aunt Martha had fled.

Then came days that were, to Teronne, four hundred and seven years long from breakfast to supper. Her room was on the second floor, overlooking an apple orchard. It was a delightful room, but she was not permitted to remain in it. The doctor had given Aunt Martha definite instructions and Aunt Martha determined that they should be carried out to the letter.

Teronne was to walk only the very few feet necessary to take her from her room to the front porch and there she was to sit in the big rocking chair, breathe the fresh ozone from the virgin fields, look upon the blooming lilacs and daisies and remain totally inactive until she had recovered.

"It wouldn't be so bad," the city girl sighed, "if there was only something to do or something to look at. Half the time you're away and I simply sit here and stare. Why in the name of goodness doesn't somebody go by on that road once in a while? For three days the total count is four cats, six hens, one cow and a red-headed boy with a sling shot."

"It is a side road," returned Aunt Martha. "Very few persons ever use it. Why don't you play solitaire or take up knitting?"

"I'll take up an ax and go out and murder somebody if this keeps on," Teronne prophesied. "I can't stand solitude. If you hear of a slinking figure going around setting farmhouses on fire and slaughtering the helpless inmates, that's your beloved niece, who has gone dippy as a result of homesickness."

Aunt Martha, who knew nothing of life in a great city, except that it was the most wicked sort of life there is, sympathized vaguely and walked down the path. Teronne would gladly have given her right eye to follow—to go berrying or picking flowers or strolling through the woods. She even began to long for the complimentary remarks of the Omar Khayyam floor-walker back in town, a young man whom she usually regarded as the lowest form of animal life and a positive proof that Darwin was right. Never before had she appreciated what a wonderful joy it is to be able to walk.

On the drowsy afternoon breeze there came to her wistful ears the faint, mellow tones of distant motor-cars as they zipped along the macadam between Bridgeport and New York. It was such a short distance in to the big town and Teronne felt that she was a million miles away.

She decided that she would give forty dollars to see a big red car pass, filled with laughing people who had no troublesome things the matter with them. And instantly as if in answer to her forty dollar thought, the hood of a machine showed over the brow of the hill and the car purred along, passing the gate directly before her eyes. True, it contained only a colored gentleman in blue livery, but the Ethiopian cheered Teronne appreciably and she wondered why she had not always thought well of Ethiopians.

Presently another car poked its nose over the hill and after that came a saucy red runabout, containing a rosy-cheeked girl

and a handsome youth; and then a silky limousine in which lounged an elderly man with gray hair and a little girl; and a racing craft with two college lads from New Haven on their way to New York to singe a bit of father's dough; and a fleet of automobile trucks, stripped of their bodies and bound for the New York piers, to be shipped over seas to the war; and anon a touring-car containing father and the family, numbering seven persons; and a beer truck loaded with kegs, either empty or full.

In short, instead of seeing one car for the mythical forty dollars, Teronne gazed with delighted eyes all afternoon upon a veritable parade of coughing, spluttering, honking machines. At supper time Aunt Martha explained:

"They've just closed the State road to traffic on account of repairs," she said, "and so all the cars have to make a detour. They turn off the main road at Higgins Corner and back again at old man Ellert's farm, three miles down. I suppose you'll be satisfied, now that you have something to look at."

"You won't hear another peep from me," Teronne answered. "Thanks for the busted main road. May they have a lot of trouble fixing it."

It was late on Tuesday afternoon that an outbound limousine whirled through the narrow lane and Teronne suddenly cried out. Her little cry had no effect, because the car continued on its way and the man inside remained oblivious. But the man was Mr. Peter Sinclair, her employer.

Teronne remembered that the Sinclair country home was somewhere in Connecticut, within easy motor distance of the City. The trifling event provided her with meditation and later with conversation at the supper table.

Wednesday being market day, Aunt Martha hitched up the brown mare and drove away shortly after breakfast and Teronne viewed the day gloomily. Martha would not return until evening. From the depths of her chair, the invalid spoke her candid opinion of all human ailments and especially appendicitis, which prevents one from moving about.

It was shortly before noon when a shiny, blue runabout clattered up over the hill. Teronne gazed upon it moodily and observed that it contained a handsome young man, beside whom sat a girl with white furs about her throat. In the distance, she

seemed an attractive girl, and Teronne prepared to criticize the back of her hat as the car sped over the hill and down the opposite incline.

But the runabout did not proceed down the hill. Instead it very deliberately came to a pause before Aunt Martha's gate and the young man jumped out.

He walked briskly around the car and aided his companion to alight. Then he turned with her, entered the gate and walked up toward Teronne.

As he came nearer, the invalid experienced a small thrill. He wore a blue suit that fitted him perfectly. He had tan shoes and a blue cravat and a silk shirt, with a soft, but not sport, collar. When he stopped and smiled apologetically, Teronne concluded that looking at him was no effort at all.

"A very nice young man," Teronne remarked to herself. "A *particularly* nice young man."

Then she began to notice a certain air of nervousness about him: He fidgeted. His smile, still apologetic, became constrained. He seemed to be a person who was doing something at which he desired not to be apprehended.

The girl, on the contrary, was completely at ease. Teronne turned a questioning eye upon her and started. In a moment she recognized her. It was Vivian Sinclair, the blooming and youthful daughter of the store's owner, who now and then visited her papa in his office and made the shop girls horribly envious.

"I beg your pardon," the young man was saying, "but the fact is I am quite taken—that is, we are quite taken—by the quaint, old-fashioned appearance of your home. It is really quite ultra-New England, and I wonder if you would think us impertinent if I asked you for permission to go inside. It must be quite full of old treasures."

"We don't want to be in the least rude," added the young lady in a clear, sweet voice, "but I have been looking for an old high-boy for ages. Perhaps you have one."

"Have one what?" Teronne demanded, rising slowly to her feet.

"A high-boy," repeated the young man.

Teronne reflected rapidly. To the best of her knowledge, Aunt Martha had no boys of any kind, high or low. Was it possible that her staid Aunt Martha was a Connecticut deceiver and harbored youths about the place, unknown to any one?

"Why sure, you can go in," Teronne answered. "I'm a stranger here, though. The house belongs to my aunt. I'm just visiting. And if there's a high-boy inside I give you my word I never saw him. He may be in the cellar."

The young lady in white furs stared and so did the young man. They decided that perhaps the lady on the porch was jesting.

"It might be in the attic," suggested Miss Sinclair.

"Ah," murmured Teronne to herself. "It's an it." Then aloud, she said: "Yes, it might be in the attic. Aunt Martha keeps all sorts of truck up there."

"Will you be so kind—" began the young man.

"I'm sorry," Teronne smiled, "but I'm an invalid, although I don't look it, and one of the things I mustn't do is walk. I have to sit perfectly still. But you go right on in by yourselves. There's nobody home but me."

The two gazed at her in some perplexity and then decided to venture inside. Teronne slipped down into her chair. She could hear them moving about through the open window, murmuring their pleased surprise. So far as Teronne had observed, the house was full of ancient furniture, which, she thought, principally needed fresh varnish and a repair man. Presently the explorers proceeded to the second floor and a short time later the young man reappeared.

His former nervousness had plainly returned. He looked about guiltily and smiled at Teronne, who smiled back at him.

He certainly was extraordinarily nice and his eyes were friendly. He paused beside the girl's chair and glanced down sympathetically.

"I hope your illness passes very quickly," he said. "You look quite strong. And if you will pardon the remark—alluring also."

"Thanks," Teronne returned. "Nobody's told me that in ages. I'll be well in a little while. I've had appendicitis and now I'm all right, except that I can't walk for a time."

"I would like to take you in the car," he said venturesomely. "I'll bet a good, fast spin through the country would bring the posies back to your cheeks. My name, by the way, which I forgot to mention when we intruded, is George Whitlock. The young lady, now in ecstasies over your aunt's furniture, is Miss Sinclair."

"I'm Teronne Metcalf," she returned.

"And let me tell you something. If I could go riding in your motor-car, I would consider it a little slice of heaven. I am simply bored to death and so weary of sitting still that I could scream. Want me to scream a little for you?"

They laughed and talked a little further. But the young man's increasing perturbation was very plainly apparent. He glanced toward the road at frequent intervals. And a moment later, when a limousine slipped up the hill, Mr. Whitlock stepped quickly behind a pillar, as though to hide.

In the limousine was Vivian Sinclair's father. The car passed on. Teronne suddenly comprehended the situation.

"Eloping, by jimminy!" she muttered.

She remembered that the Sinclair home was somewhere in the vicinity. No doubt Vivian's father was pursuing the young couple. Were they already married? Or were they now on their way to the minister? Well, one thing was sure. Vivian Sinclair was a lucky girl.

Mr. Whitlock stared after the retreating limousine and breathed a sigh of relief. Without another word he hurried down to the runabout and disappeared on the other side of the machine. At intervals Teronne caught a glimpse of an extended arm or leg, as the young man struggled with something or other under the car. After a while he emerged, wiping a grease mark from his face, and as he came up the steps Miss Sinclair appeared at the other end of the porch.

"Thanks so much," she said to Teronne. "It's perfectly delightful furniture, but I failed to find my high-boy. I feel guilty prowling about a stranger's home. Perhaps if I returned when your aunt was here she might—"

"Certainly," said Teronne. "Come back any time you're passing. Maybe Aunt Martha has a high-boy out in the barn."

"We'll have to hurry on now. It's getting late. I'm very glad to have met you. I'm Miss Sinclair."

"And this is Miss Metcalf," put in Whitlock. He turned to her. "I won't forget about that ride. Tell your aunt that we are very much obliged to you both."

The travelers smiled and passed down to the car. Whitlock helped the girl into her seat, took his place, grasped the levers with the easy familiarity of an old hand, and the runabout faded off down the hill. The

young man turned, smiled and waved his cap.

"No, you won't forget about that ride," Teronne repeated a bit wistfully. "Of course not. Your blushing bride will certainly give three cheers when you tell her you're coming back to take a poor young wreck out for fresh air. Well, good luck, young folks. Be happy while you can. I hope father doesn't grab you before you find a preacher. Drat the luck, anyhow. That's the first nice-looking boy I've seen in years, and, of course, he has to be starting away on his honeymoon."

Teronne gazed down at her fingers, which the young man had clasped a few moments before. He had pressed them with some vigor. Some people had all the good fortune, she reflected, surveying mentally Miss Sinclair's charm, her manner and her wealth. Nothing to do but wait in affluent leisure until a perfectly stunning man came along and then run away with him, while father prowled behind in a futile chase.

It was very clear why they had stopped. They knew they were being pursued, and by letting the old gentleman scurry on ahead they threw him off the scent completely. Now they could turn off anywhere and father would go on into town. And their confounded high-boys—nothing but a subterfuge. They wanted the shelter of Aunt Martha's house, not her high-boys.

Teronne sighed. Romance had seemed always to pass her by, in spite of the undeniable fact that she was fair to look upon. Her romances consisted of clumsy advances made by doughy young men who asked her out to dine in the vague hope that she would drink too much wine. Or the more definite approaches of evil-eyed floor-walkers who threatened her with the loss of her job.

Once there had been a young man, but he had married a chorus girl and died of drink, which, when you come to think of it, was just as well for Teronne herself.

"Well, what's the matter with you?" Aunt Martha demanded that night at supper. "You look as though you'd lost your last friend."

"Nothing wrong with me," Teronne returned tartly. "Only I just got a flash at a thing called Happiness to-day and it's made me moony. I'm going back to work as quick as I can. This quiet life is beginning to kill me."

Very wise professors in colleges will tell you that the day of miracles has utterly

passed. Don't believe it. Ask Teronne. In the glorious sunshine of the following morning, while the girl sat in her hated rocking chair and felt unaccountably lonely and neglected, a fat, expensive, soft-cushioned and gently purring motor-car poked its glossy nose over the brow of the hill and drew up deliberately before Aunt Martha's gate. Out of it stepped George Whitlock. He came up the walk smilingly and Teronne gazed at him as though he were a specter.

"Well, young lady," he began cheerfully, "how's the recuperating business to-day?"

"I'm—I'm pretty well, thank you," Teronne faltered, the melancholy within her suddenly departing under the young man's smile.

"You look perfectly fine," he continued, twiddling his cap. "I've had you pretty constantly on my mind since yesterday, and the more I thought about that fresh-air ride the surer I became that it is what you need to complete this cure."

"It's nice of you," Teronne answered. "Where—where is your—where is Miss Sinclair to-day?"

"I presume she's at home," Whitlock replied, looking at Teronne curiously. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, I was just wondering," Teronne went on. Then, with sudden mischievousness: "Didn't you put the big deal over?"

The young man stared hard. Then he laughed and sat down at the invalid's feet.

"I certainly did," he said; "and thanks to you."

"Me!"

"Yes, you."

"What did I have to do with it?"

"You gave me a chance when I needed to act quickly."

"You mean you had a chance to come in and hide from her father?"

"No; I don't mean that at all. Why should I hide from her father?"

"Wasn't Mr. Sinclair chasing you? I saw you dodge behind the pillar. And I knew he was her father. What I wondered was whether you were already married before you got this far, or whether you pulled it off later on?"

"Married!" shouted Mr. Whitlock, dropping his cap to the lawn and staring, with mouth open. "What in the world are you talking about?"

"Well, you two were running away from the old gentleman, weren't you?"

"No!" he retorted firmly; "we were not. Did you think— Who told you— Oh, my Lord! You thought we were eloping!"

"I certainly did think you were eloping," said Teronne, and a happy contentment ran through her. "You looked guilty enough for it. Remember how you stood out here gazing at the road and dancing from one foot to the other? That is certainly my idea of the way a young man acts when he is running off with a girl, with her father right behind."

Mr. Whitlock indulged in prolonged mirth. Teronne gazed down upon him sternly.

"I knew all the time you weren't looking for a high-boy," she went on. "And now that we're talking about it, what is a high-boy?"

"It's an old dresser full of drawers that you can't open," he laughed.

He paused and surveyed the girl with a whimsical smile. She was clad in a white gown, with a bit of blue ribbon at her throat, and there was a rose in her hair. She was still a trifle pallid, but her eyes were dancing and bright.

Under the pallor the faint suggestion of a flush turned her smooth cheek a trifle pink. Mr. Whitlock stared in deep and prolonged pleasure.

"Well," he said slowly, "I guess I've got to tell you the truth, and nothing but the truth, s'elp me Buddha. You're too nice a girl not to know everything.

"In the first place, I had, and still have, not the remotest intention of marrying myself unto Miss Sinclair. Secondly, she wouldn't marry me, anyhow, because she's engaged to Freddy Walthour, who has more money than an adding machine can count in three years. And, thirdly, that's all about that.

"Why I stopped the runabout in front of your nice home, and thus met nice you, is this: I have been trying to sell that doggone runabout to Miss Sinclair for some time, in spite of her dad's protest that she doesn't need another car, having two already. But she liked the runabout, and I'm an automobile salesman, and there isn't a better car in the world than the Wycherly. Yesterday was the first time I've had a chance to take the lady out on a good, long demonstration; and now come the sad facts.

"The confounded carbureter began to clog up about a mile east of here, which is the first time that ever happened. Naturally, I didn't want to break down while

demonstrating a supposedly perfect car to a prospective customer. So I just stopped here, invoked the high-boy, and, as you observed, fixed up the carbureter while the lady inspected your blessed aunt's furniture. Furthermore, I tightened a loose brake, and— Well, thanks to you, I sold the machine. And that's all about that."

"My goodness!" said Teronne Metcalf when he had finished.

Mr. Whitlock chuckled long and enjoyably. Presently Aunt Martha appeared, observed the expensive machine before her house, and came wonderingly up the path, whereupon Teronne introduced her aunt to her caller.

"It seems to me," he said deferentially, "that a ride would do Miss Metcalf a world of good. She tells me she has sat perfectly still for weeks, and—well, if I carried her out and placed her gently in the car, and then drove very gently and quietly along, with the fresh air blowing and the perfume of the flowers rising and—"

"Say no more!" Teronne exclaimed, rising to her feet. "I am going motoring, if I never do another thing, and immediately die when the ride is over."

Aunt Martha protested timidly, but her words were as a soft whisper under Niagara Falls on a windy day. Obeying the commands of her suddenly energetic niece, she went into the house, and returned with a coat, a hat and a blue veil.

The flush in Teronne's cheek deepened. She knew by the defiant, stern and unyielding glint in Whitlock's eye that the moment her hat was on her head and the veil about her face he would pick her up in his arms and forthwith carry her to the car.

And I violate no one's confidence when I state that that was precisely what Mr. Whitlock did. In his arms Teronne felt perfectly safe and comfortable.

To be sure, she blushed a bit, and she was glad she did. Aunt Martha stood on the porch, and hesitated between disapproval and cheerfulness. Mr. Whitlock, rather reluctantly, deposited the fair invalid upon the softest cushions she had ever felt, and then took his place behind the big wheel. They started, and to Teronne it was Heaven with a capital H.

"How do you feel?" Whitlock demanded after they had covered half a dozen miles at an easy pace.

"If I felt any better I'd die," Teronne answered.

Mr. Whitlock violated the steering and

road rules long enough to reach over and pat her shoulder.

"I'll bring the posies back to your cheek," he said cheerily. "I certainly did like you the minute I saw you. And didn't I tell you I'd come back and take you for a ride?"

"You are a perfectly wonderful man," Teronne returned, fixing upon him the serene battery of her eyes, "and—as I thought when you first came up the path—a very nice one."

Whereupon, Mr. Whitlock smiled hap-

pily, and for a moment, due to his mental disturbance and consequent nerve-flutter, transmitted to the wheel, he threatened to run down a red and white cow. But he safely missed her.

"We'll do a lot of riding, you and I," he murmured.

"We can't do too much to suit me," Teronne answered. "I feel a hundred per cent. better already."

And as she suddenly thought of Vivian Sinclair and her wealthy father, she felt sorry for both of them.



I.

"THERE is nothing more for me to say, my lieutenant," purred the little man with the swarthy skin and pointed blue-black mustache. "It is, as you Americans have it, 'up to you.' I shall wait here yet one month; it is a pleasant place and there are charming people. You shall think it over well. When you understand me clearly and decide to do for me the little service I require, then I shall do for you a very great service—is it not? You are in trouble, you have much distress pressing all the time upon your mind. I shall help you out of all that trouble and make you happy."

Lieutenant Fosdick moved his chair back from the little table at which they sat on the veranda of the hotel. He crossed his legs with a quick, nervous movement.

"You're so confoundedly cryptical about it all, Mr. Synka!" he exclaimed impatiently. "You offer me friendship and aid in my difficulties in a very mysterious way, and you talk in whispers of a return service that I am to render, but you leave it to me to guess what it is. I'm a poor guesser."

The little man smiled craftily.

"Not so poor a guesser, my friend, if you would be frank with me," he replied. "We have had some interesting conversations; you know of the things which interest me. Well, you are too intelligent not to know something of the sort of service that would be gratifying to me."

Fosdick frowned and drummed on the table with the tips of his fingers.

"I think you're over-cautious, Synka," he said. "It's about time for a showdown, if there's anything to be done. You have corrupted me, one might say, merely by

getting me to listen to your veiled proposals. A stranger—an acquaintance of three weeks—does not offer to pay a man's debts and give him money to get married on, for mere altruism. Do you suppose that I would have listened to you for ten seconds without knocking you down if I were not in a desperate situation—so desperate that I no longer have all the fine feelings of an honest man? Damn you, Synka! I want the money! I can't deny it for a moment. But I want to know what I have to do to get it."

Synka compressed his lips and regarded the army officer intently for a minute, without speaking. Presently he smiled slowly and inquired irrelevantly:

"Are your official accounts in good order, Mr. Fosdick? I understand that you have the handling of certain funds in connection with your duties."

Fosdick flushed angrily.

"That is no affair of yours!" he exclaimed sharply. "Don't go too far with your insolence!"

Synka smiled again.

"I think that I am answered," he said. "The man whose accounts are in good order is not so sensitive about them. Well, well, I think we understand each other. I am a cautious man, it is true; but, as you say, there must be a show-down before we can do business. See, I have confidence in you, my friend; I place my life and my liberty in your hands, as it were. I have five thousand dollars in the currency of your country, ready to hand you, and all that I require in return is a set of careful and accurate tracings of the new fortifications, complete; a chart of your mine fields, and a working diagram of your fire control."

The lieutenant's hands dropped to his sides and he bowed his head.

"I knew, of course, that it was something like that," he muttered hoarsely, after a moment of tense silence. "Great God! man, do you know what it means? It's the sale of my soul! I never could look a man in the face again. I have been mentioned as one of the rising engineers of the army. The new fortifications are partly my own work. I helped to design the fire control. My God!"

Synka nodded, smiling kindly, with a sort of sympathy.

"Why think too seriously about it?" he asked. "It means many other things, does it not? It means that you can pay your debts and keep your reputation as a gentle-

man. You can marry the young lady and have no worry about the future. A young man must live. You have made for yourself many troublesome debts, and you have chosen to marry a lady of some station in society; so, there you are!

"I offer you five thousand dollars. For you it is a fortune, just now. I want the tracings and the diagrams for—for a certain purpose; but what injury shall ever come to your country on account of my having them? Your great nation is at peace with the world, and it is not a military country. Really, my lieutenant, one might say that your fears and your outraged loyalty are little more than matters of pretty sentiment."

Fosdick got up and paced the veranda.

"I can't tell you—now," he muttered brokenly. "I can't—think; I don't know what I'm about. You are driving me mad with your fiendish logic and your platitudes."

"I shall wait," replied the little man, with a satisfied smirk. "You will find me here when you are ready."

"Take care I don't kill you!" broke out the officer savagely.

Synka shrugged.

"Young men think twice before killing the golden goose," he said quietly. "Don't be too agitated about it, my friend. Go away, now, where you can think it over by yourself."

Fosdick regarded him with bitter contempt and loathing for an instant, then hurried away from the hotel and took the road leading to the fort.

Young Captain Waters of the artillery stopped him on the parade ground as he passed through the reservation toward his quarters.

"How goes it, Harry?" inquired the captain, putting an arm over the other's shoulders. "You look all in."

"Rotten!" answered Fosdick.

"Well, something has got to be done," said Waters pointedly. "You know, Harry, that Benton is merely an ass; but we can't do anything with him. He says that a gambling debt is as serious as any obligation, and he won't wait for you any longer. If you don't settle with him this week, he'll take the matter up to the K. O., and—well, you know about what will happen."

"Oh, yes, I know!" Fosdick responded miserably. "But give me time. Perhaps—perhaps I'll settle with him this week."

"You've said that before, Harry," persisted the captain. "Now, come down off your high horse, old man, and do something. You know that I'll help you if you'll only listen to me. You've got friends here, Harry, even if you have made a beastly mess of things. You're in very bad with your mess account, but some of the boys will be glad to fix that up if you'll be decent about things. You've taken the corkingest girl in the post right away from us, but still the boys are ready to stick by you, for your sake as well as for her pride and happiness. The thing has got to end somewhere, Harry!"

Fosdick stood and looked at the ground for a long time, his face pale and set, his hands twitching.

"Just tell the boys to wait a little longer," he said at last. "I am going to—I'm expecting something—oh, just ask them to wait a little longer, that's all!"

Captain Waters looked at him with troubled eyes, then patted him on the shoulder gently, and then walked away.

At the entrance to the bachelor officers' quarters Fosdick came face to face with Lieutenant Benton, who held his "I. O. U.'s" for sums aggregating eight hundred dollars. Their eyes met for an instant, but there was no friendly salute. Benton deliberately turned his head away and passed out into the yard without a sign of recognition.

The blood surged into Fosdick's face until his cheeks burned. He had felt the unfriendliness of two or three of his fellow officers for several days, but this was the first time he had received what amounted to a slap in the face.

He sat in his quarters and smoked for half an hour, then changed his undress uniform for service blouse and breeches, and went out quietly for a walk on the beach. He heard the mess call, but did not respond to it; he went instead to the drafting-room in the workshops.

The engineer officers had all gone for the day, and he walked past the sentry on guard and began to busy himself at the drafting tables and the blue-print cases. He had often worked after hours by himself, and was reasonably sure that his presence would attract no undue attention.

When he returned to quarters at ten o'clock he carried a roll of papers under his arm. Dr. Frank, the post surgeon, stood on the porch, smoking, and Fosdick was forced to stop for a moment.

"My dear Fosdick," said the surgeon, "there is certainly something the matter with your health or your spirits. You haven't been yourself for the last three weeks or more. I've spoken to some of the fellows about it, and while they're confoundedly close-mouthed, I've gathered that you're worrying about—well, what most of us have to worry about. If any petty difficulties are making you so melancholy, I wish you would feel that I am your friend; I really do!"

"You're very good, doctor," replied Fosdick, gratefully, "but I'm afraid there's nothing you can do for me. When a man makes troubles for himself he must fight them out himself."

The surgeon shook his head with a regretful frown, then forced a smile and waved his hand toward the roll of paper.

"You're always at work," he grumbled. "Much better for you if you'd take a rest. Forget your beastly blue-prints and things for a while till you get rid of the blue devils."

"Work is about all the solace a man with the blue devils can find," said the lieutenant nervously, edging toward the door. "I'm mighty grateful for your interest and sympathy, doctor. I *am* all in to-night, and I'm going to bed early. Good-night."

He gained his room without further molestation, but instead of going to bed he spread the papers on his cot and became feverishly active. Scarcely ten minutes had passed, however, before there was a knock at his door.

He shuffled the papers hastily together and thrust them under the cot, then unlocked and opened the door.

An orderly saluted him.

"Colonel Thurston's compliments, sir," said the soldier, "and if it's convenient for you he would like to have you report to him at once at his house; unofficially, sir."

"My compliments to Colonel Thurston," replied Fosdick quietly. "Say to him that I will report there directly."

Fosdick slipped into his undress uniform hurriedly and went to obey the summons. Captain Waters and Major Godfrey were going home from the officers' casino as he mounted the steps of the commandant's house, and they recognized him as the moonlight fell for an instant on his face.

"I'm afraid, Godfrey, that the end is beginning, or has come, for Harry Fosdick," remarked Waters regretfully. "He wouldn't

be going to the K. O.'s house at this time of night unless he had been sent for."

"Poor devil!" exclaimed the major, and sighed profoundly.

II.

On the following afternoon Lieutenant Fosdick left the fort and walked in the direction of the town. He was dressed, as was the custom for officers going outside the reservation, in civilian clothes, and he carried a suit-case. He took the street-car to the town, and on arriving there telephoned to a summer resort near the fort, calling for Mr. Synka.

"I am here at the hotel in town, Synka," he said tersely. "I have something to show you. I'll wait for you in a private room if you'll come here right away."

Synka seemed to consider for a moment.

"I think, my friend, that it is better that you should come here to me," he answered, without his habitual display of formality. "Here it is very quiet. We shall smoke and talk very comfortably, if you will be so kind."

"It's all the same to me, if that suits you better," said Fosdick.

Ten minutes later, after attending to some other necessary business in his official capacity, he took a taxicab and drove to the summer hotel by a road that did not pass the fort. He announced himself to the clerk merely as a man to see Mr. Synka, and was told to go at once to Synka's room, as he was expected.

"Ah, my dear friend!" exclaimed the little man, as he opened the door and cast a beaming eye upon the suit-case.

Fosdick stepped in and closed the door.

"We are not friends, Synka," he said sharply, with grim bitterness, "and I'll thank you to leave everything but business out of our talk. I have brought you—what you want. Now, do your damnable part of the trick!"

Synka smiled at him genially, evidently amused at his ill humor rather than resentful. He stooped quickly and undid the fastenings of the suit-case. With eager, quivering fingers he unrolled a dozen sheets of tracings and mechanical diagrams, and chuckled audibly.

"It's very warm here," grumbled Fosdick, fidgeting nervously. "I feel positively ill. If you don't mind I'll lay off my coat."

"By all means!" returned Synka cordially. "Let me take your coat."

"It will do very well here," said Fosdick, and placed his tweed coat across the window seat, pausing to take a deep breath of the mild sea air that gently fanned the curtains.

"Suppose you fulfil your part of the contract before you examine the things so minutely!" he exclaimed a moment later, with a return to his brusque manner.

"By all means, my dear sir," agreed Synka readily.

He got up from his inspection of the tracings, went to a trunk, and took out a small satchel, the opening of which disclosed several orderly packets of paper money.

"Wait a moment," ordered Fosdick. "I can still withdraw from the bargain, you know, and take back my plans. I have one or two conditions to make. I have sold myself to you, Synka; now, what are you going to do with me? If I am not betrayed or discovered, my conscience will not permit me to remain in the service. I may resign and explain that I am going into private engineering work, but I have to secure myself with regard to my future. No matter what price you are paying me, I am doing a great thing for you, Synka: the amount you are paying is evidence enough of the fact. I have no doubt that it means honor and distinction for you. I have sold myself to you and your employers, and now you must have further work for me."

Synka stood back and looked at him thoughtfully.

"You are a more sensible young man than I thought you at first," he said softly, with a glint of cunning in his eyes. "Yes, I can give you more work to do; and if you are straightforward and honest with me, my friend, I can promise you great profit, great honor—possibly actual distinction in time."

Fosdick stepped closer to him. "Am I right in thinking that I have performed a service for the secret intelligence department of the government of—"

He paused, then spoke the name of a great European power, in a low whisper.

Synka laughed softly and shook his head.

"You sometimes do not guess right, my friend," he chuckled. "But I will show you how much confidence I have in you. I will do you the honor to tell you that you have rendered valuable service to the government of—"

He paused, as Fosdick had done, then

pronounced the name of a first-class foreign power in a voice hushed with awe and veneration.

"My guess as to your nationality was also wrong," remarked Fosdick soberly. "Very well, Mr. Synka, if you are disposed to meet my conditions, we will go on with the present transaction. You'll pardon me, I'm sure, if I verify the amount of the payment."

He took the satchel from the willing hand of the little man and removed a packet of the money.

"Each of these contains, it appears, a thousand dollars," he said.

"Yes, a thousand," agreed Synka, who was now on his knees by the suit-case, ardently fingering the plans and uttering little exclamations of delight.

"If you don't mind waiting till I get out of here, Synka," said the lieutenant suddenly, "I wish you'd delay your celebration. I'm still sensitive and the sight of those things makes me ill."

The little man got up and looked at him inquiringly. A scarcely perceptible gleam of suspicion crept into his eyes.

"You are now too deep in the conspiracy, my friend, for me to have any fear of you," he said craftily, "but I warn you to keep faith with me in every respect. Men in my profession are essentially desperate in a crisis. I wonder, now, if we should have left that window open! We have spoken softly, but—"

He paused; then, before Fosdick apprehended his intention, glided swiftly to the window and pulled down the opened sash, dragging the tweed coat from the sill as he did so.

Fosdick uttered a smothered imprecation, and at the same instant Synka cried out, in wild alarm. His eye had fallen upon a small, silk-covered wire which ran out of a pocket of the coat and extended over the sill and downward.

With the darting quickness of a snake the little man let go the coat and whipped out an automatic, beating Fosdick's hand to his own hip-pocket by a second.

The lieutenant knew that the time for parley and strategy had passed; that fingers do not dwell long upon triggers in such crises.

With his left hand he let drive the satchel of money, hard at Synka's head.

Its impact sounded synchronously with the sharp "ping" of the automatic, and as

the small steel projectile whirled past his ear so close that he felt the air which it displaced, he saw the little man topple backward and fall over a chair.

In the same breath he threw himself upon him, holding him down and grappling the wrist of the hand that still clutched the dangerous weapon.

The sound of hurrying feet came from beyond the door, and then there was a loud knock upon the panel.

"Break it down!" shouted Fosdick.

There was a great thud, a splintering crash, and the door burst inward.

Colonel Thurston, Captain Waters and an artillery sergeant sprang into the room, and Fosdick, wresting the pistol from the hand of the helpless spy, stood up and saluted.

The elderly commandant of the fort looked at the little man whose swarthy face was distorted with fright and rage, and smiled grimly.

"Put your handcuffs on this fellow, sergeant," he ordered, "and take him to the fort with your squad."

"Fosdick," he went on, turning to the lieutenant, "we arrived in the room below just in time to get all we needed of your conversation, and it was exactly what we wanted. You did a handsome piece of work, Fosdick, and you won't lose anything by it."

Captain Waters stood open-mouthed with amazement.

"By Gad! Harry," he cried, "I'm happy to hear this! But I'm bewildered. The colonel—begging your pardon, colonel!—put it over on me. Until a moment ago I thought we were running you down as a traitor. I'm blessed if I understand the game even now!"

Colonel Thurston patted Fosdick affectionately on the back.

"Secrecy has been the keynote of this affair, Waters," he said. "For some weeks Harry Fosdick has been engaged in performing a very valuable service to his country. The man with whom the sergeant is now engaged in the hall is one of the craftiest military spies in the world. He has obtained important information in past years by working upon the susceptibilities of certain poor fellows to whom money meant the breath of life. We knew that he would be after plans of the new defenses, so we decided that the best bait for a trap would be a man notoriously down on his luck.

"Harry Fosdick was assigned to the distasteful rôle, and much against his principles he has been running up an unlovely reputation as a gambler and profligate. His histrionic skill was so effective that the little man out there made unexpected haste to cultivate his acquaintance. Fosdick told me last night that the trap was ready to be sprung.

"In order to keep the secret safe he saw me as little as possible. I had his movements watched to-day, as though he were a suspect, and as soon as he was reported on his way to this place I brought you here with me to watch him. I apologize to you, Waters, for letting you think that the dictograph wire which we coupled to the re-

ceiver was lowered to us by the other fellow."

Waters grasped Fosdick's hand and wrung it fervently.

"Do you mean to tell me, you old scoundrel!" he exclaimed with mock severity, "that you are not the hopeless rake we put you down for?"

"I am by nature the most well-behaved and law-abiding member of the corps of engineers," answered Fosdick jocularly. "Fortunately I have a bank account that is always sufficient for my obligations, and you will oblige me greatly, Waters, if you'll tell Benton and the treasurer of the mess that I'll hand each of them a check this evening, with an apology."

Cochrane's Australian Stunt



by

Frank A. Russell

THE two men sat in a cheap room, in a cheap hotel in Castlereagh Street, Sydney. "You hopeless, brainless mutt; you poor simp!" the man by the window was saying. "So you just lost the money, eh? Just lost our bank roll, that we were depending on? Good Lord, you make me sick. Five thousand iron men, and gone in a pig's whisper. You saphead, you—"

The man on the bed was goaded into a reply.

"You've got no kick comin'. It was my roll, when it comes to a showdown. What if I did lose it? You're no worse off. 'Twas my money. You let me alone."

"Oh, yes, it was your roll, all right; but what made it yours? We hadn't been two days out from 'Frisco, before you were in the hands of the Philistines. Who put you wise? Who handled that crook Handley, when he got too gay, tell me that?"

"Why, you were the joke of the ship. They used to tell me that when you sat in a game it was like taking candy from a baby. A precious lot you'd have had, if I hadn't stepped in and put you wise. Yes, and afterwards shepherded you.

"It was your roll, but I'd made up my mind that I'd—Aw, what's the use, it's gone. What've we got left?"

"I've got nothing. I cashed my letter of

credit at Honolulu, and the sharps on the racetrack at Randwick yesterday got the little the guys on the boat left. I was counting on this draft, an' played them the limit yesterday. When I found my pocket-book gone with all the money, I was just knocked stiff. But can't we—?"

"Cut out that whimper stuff, Harding, I'm in no mood to listen to the yarn again. The money's gone, and we're up against it good and hard. It's one chance in a hundred the police 'll get a line on the bird that did you up. What with a few lucky nights on board, I have about five hundred dollars, and that's got to last us till we make good."

"God knows what our present partnership's going to lead to. Before to-day it was your money and my brains. Now you're a passenger, but I can't shake you, you good-for-nothing little cuss, you're too helpless to shake; it ud be like child-desertion."

The young fellow on the bed, Harding, made a gesture of gratitude, and his face sensibly expressed something like hero-worship for the big personality that could express affection even while it admonished.

"Look here, Jim," he said, "I'll cut out racing and cards. There must be something in a country like this for us, and if trying will do it—"

"Now, see here, Bunny, we'll wait for the New Year before we start the resolutions. We've got something else to do just now. I'm not going over the story of my past life, and I'm not in the sob picture game, but when I left the States, I made up my mind that a fellow that can live by his wits can also live by his brains, and in some business worth while, too."

"My father was a gentleman, and tried to make me one. He failed, but I managed to get a smattering of the externals, even to the education. I shied at the rest, and became a slangy, free-an'-easy fellow, content to be admired by those miles below what I could have been, 'stead of trying my luck with my equals, and beating them to something worth while."

"You know what living by my wits led to. You ought to, for you lived by them too, till you got that lucky windfall that brought us to Australia. I reckoned this new country and your roll would see us both going straight, in a straight business, and kinder disappoint the folks over home looking for me to come a mucker and giving

them the satisfaction of saying, I told you so. There's plenty of opportunity here. Hang it, can't they see I'm fighting to make good, without skinning suckers?"

His voice was bitter, as he rose, and seemed to fill the little room with his bulk. He leaned out of the window, idly scanning the electric signs of this Queen City of the Antipodes.

"Look here, Bunny," he said presently, "I'm sick of this room, of you, and of the rotten subject of our woes. There's a little bit of the United States outside these windows, and a few shillings out of our remnants won't make or break us. Come on out and see the place. You've only seen a racecourse since we landed, and I've been all day in real estate offices, snooping after property."

"You remember Fred Niblo, don't you? Married Georgy Cohan's sister? Well, he's in town playing 'Wallingford,' and that's good United States, and in my old line. Come on out, and have a laugh. Sorry I was raw, just now. There's nothing to worry about, after all. Darn it, I can make five thousand in a couple of days, if I like to resume business at the old stand. Why, Bunny son, cheer up, you look 'all in.' " While speaking, Cochrane was struggling into his overcoat, for a drizzling rain had set in, and in a couple of minutes he and Harding were ready for the street.

Their hotel had been chosen for its cheapness in the first throes of a resolution to economize, until they had increased the five thousand-odd that constituted their joint capital into something that would run to white lights and joy.

Walking the block or two to the theater, Cochrane talked the gloomy Bunny into something like his own state of careless good humor. Above all things an opportunist, he rarely let present misfortune usurp the thoughts needed for planning future campaigns, and his mind, ever keen to plot and plan, was equally ready to seize the hour when it came bearing the opportunity.

As they laughed and applauded, throughout the play, it would have been difficult for the observer to recognize in them two soldiers of fortune who had been cut off from their base, surrounded by the enemy, painfully short of ammunition, and confronted by the necessity of fighting, or only by the keenest strategy making their escape.

The play over, Bunny had seemingly forgotten his troubles. He was very young,

and very prone to lean on others. His chief worry of the earlier evening had been his fear of his big stable-mate's anger, and that bugaboo now in the past, his ebullient spirits rose with his confidence in Cochrane. His surprise, therefore was extreme when his remark, "Say, Jim, that Fred Niblo is one little actor, isn't he?" was met with a curt—

"Shut up!"

"What's the—?"

"Shut up. I'm working."

Nothing else was vouchsafed to Bunny on the short walk back, and very shortly afterwards, Jim Cochrane barked a curt good night to his mate and went off to his room, still wrapped in thought.

He was early astir next morning, and into Bunny's quarters.

"Out of that—lively now. We begin work to-day," he breezed, as he yanked the bedclothes off the shivering youngster.

"Work?—What, work?" that individual sleepily inquired, not awake to the grim facts of existence on a depleted exchequer.

"This is where I start to get back the five thousand you gave away. Out you come."

Breakfast over, they adjourned at Jim's command to one of the sunny seats in the gardens at the harbor's edge. Here free from all prying ears, Jim amazed the wide-eyed Bunny, not so much by what he told him, as by what he withheld.

"What's the real scheme, Jim? No more of these get-rich-quick stunts? You'll trip one of these days, and, besides, you told me you'd cut them out."

"Never you mind the particular dope, Bunny, 'slong's I put it over and show you the result in cash. I enjoyed that play last night, and it set me thinking, using my wits again. There are suckers waiting all over the world for some one to come and throw a gaff into them, and our necessity overrides my scruples. There's one man in this world I will never consent to be made uncomfortable, and his front name's James."

"Now right here in this gay city there are shrewd business men that are simply begging permission to give James Cochrane a thousand yellow sovereigns, asking nothing in return. Now close that trap of yours, and don't talk. Do what I tell you, and your Uncle Jim will show you something. You'll have your share of the work, nice easy, quiet work, and all I ask in addition is that you keep away from the racetrack and the 'good things.' D'ye get me?"

"I'd like to know more about it, Jim. Hang it, it doesn't seem the thing to start in at the old shell game two days after we land. You're 'way above that sort of business, Jim. Why don't you ask your old uncle to set you going in some legitimate line? He'd fall to it, and be tickled to death you were starting anything worth while. Look here—"

"Look you here, Bunny. This isn't the mourner's bench, and I don't want any Chautauqua stuff here. We've shaken William J. among a whole lot of other rubbish we had no use for, but if you're going to start an Australian branch you can run it alone."

"Now listen. I won't go near Uncle Ted if I'm starving, and I'm going to put this deal through. There's a scheme in it all right, but there's nothing really wrong. Some one here played you for a sucker and got your dollars. Well, that's one to them. I'm going to match my wits with one of the deep, shrewd ones of this fair city, and do him up in a perfectly fair, square and legitimate game. That'll make everything even again."

"With you, it was like taking the pennies out of a blind man's hat. You're such an easy mark, but with my plan the enemy has a big chance. It's just matching brains, that's all. Now, then, to business. Don't be surprised, whatever happens. I want you to send me this note at four o'clock precisely, addressed to the Hotel Australia, marked 'please forward.' Got a pencil?"

"Is that all I'm to know? Can't I—"

"You can obey orders and keep your mouth shut. The less you know, the more valuable you will be to me. Get your pencil and take this down; you can transcribe it later, and take it yourself to the Hotel Australia."

"Hotel Australia?" Surprise was in Bunny's face. "Gee! Jim, the little we have won't run to that. What's doing, anyway?"

"That will be my address till further orders; Bunny, you're too blamed curious. Now take down this note."

The dictated letter puckered Bunny's face into wrinkles of curiosity, but he asked no further questions and folded the scrap of paper away.

A few minutes later his dominating friend dismissed him, and humming a gay tune took his brisk way down George Street.

His next move was to step into a tailor's and purchase a ready-made but good black

morning suit, English cut, together with *et ceteras*, and a little later the tailor's glass reflected a well set-up, well be-tailored, be-spatted, top-hatted gentleman. Leaving his doffed clothing to be sent to his new address by the satisfied tradesman, he there-upon wended his way to the Bank of Australasia in Martin Place, whence he emerged a few minutes later, beaming in a satisfied manner at the flower-seller as he purchased a sprig for his buttonhole. Then he proceeded on his debonair way, with the expression of countenance that proceeds from a conscience at perfect rest.

A detour to Castlereagh Street enabled him to retrieve his bag at his former hotel, where he paid his bill and intimated his immediate intention to depart. His friend would remain, he informed the shabby cashier.

A passing hansom caught his eye, and his brisk nod at the interrogating whip brought the imposing vehicle to the curb, so that it was in state that he alighted at the Hotel Australia, that hostelry catering for the aristocracy of the traveling Australian public.

We pass over the uninteresting chronicle dealing with the sordid business details of engaging a room, and next encounter Mr. Cochrane at the hour of three in a gentle saunter up George Street—a leisurely, well-dressed man of fashion, idly surveying the passing throng, and seemingly without a care in the world.

A glance into the glittering windows of Sweet & Marlow's great jewelry establishment chained Mr. Cochrane's vagrant attention, and after an interested study of the treasures displayed for the world's admiration, he strolled in, and with an elegant manner asked the obsequious salesman at one of the counters to show him some sleeve-links and shirt-studs.

Galvanized into activity, the man behind the counter quickly had tray after tray displayed on the showcases.

"These are rather decent looking. What do you ask for them?" Mr. Cochrane showed no trace of the somewhat slangy, careless American tone habitual to him.

"Those, sir? Those are the finest opals, sir. The setting is very original. They come out at six guineas, Mr.—er—"

"Six guineas! Really they are too cheap to be good, though they certainly look well. Wonderful strides this cheap jewelry has made in recent years."

"Yessir," the tradesman answered, quick to catch his cue. "Well, yessir. P'raps they're 'ardly the thing for a gentleman who knows. P'raps these, sir—" reaching for more trays and doubling his attentions to so discerning a customer.

"Ah, these are better, decidedly. How much? Twenty-five pounds? Very reasonable, too, I should say. Thank you, I'll take these."

"Anything else, sir, to-day?" the man hastened to ask, inserting with quick, experienced fingers into the little morocco case the recent purchase, and eying with satisfaction the cash that came from sovereign case and pocketbook to pay for the goods.

Credit in Australia is so general that cash purchasers are rare and accordingly valued, not infrequently receiving a liberal discount, while checks for payment are freely taken even from strangers, if their appearance and general demeanor seem satisfactory. Nor is there much victimization in spite of this apparent carelessness.

"Anything else I can show you while you're here, sir?" the gratified salesman repeated.

"Well, I did want a gold repeater, but I find I've hardly enough money left. Another time will do," and Cochrane started to turn away.

"Not at all, sir. We will be happy to charge it to you, sir, if you will be good enough to give me your name and address. I'm sure a gentleman like you is good enough for credit here, sir," and the little man's voice held a tone of deprecation at the customer ever doubting it.

"Well, let's see some of your stuff. As well now as later. H'm—these are rather ordinary. I'm very particular about my things. Perhaps—"

"I can see you know what's what, sir," the now perspiring salesman remarked, smiling, "I see I can save time by showing you the best we have. Just come this way a bit, sir, and examine these."

Cochrane moved to the next show-case where some expensive timepieces were enshrined and ultimately chose a fifty guinea gold repeater.

"My name is James Cochrane. I am staying at the Hotel Australia, but I will be leaving soon. You might phone them and ascertain that I am actually there. There's no need for you to trust a stranger. Indeed, I prefer it," as the deprecating hand

waved the insulting suggestion away, and the placating smile ridiculed the very idea.

"Very good, then. I'll give you a check for the watch. I object to doing business on credit, and I may leave the city to-morrow and be away for some time."

"As you wish, sir, of course. Will you step over to this table to write? A pen, sir? Here is my fountain."

Three minutes later the mutually obliged pair parted, the one with a well bred but haughty nod to the menial who had just done him service, the other with much pivotal inclination and handrubbing.

Mr. James Cochrane did not go more than a few steps before his careless hand, idly stroking his chin, made the horrified discovery that a tiny growth of hair had arisen since the morning to disfigure the virgin immaculateness of his face. Providentially he was exactly opposite the door of a barber shop, which he entered. His shave was performed with the ceremony of a religious rite and was prolonged to pass almost insensibly into the soothing balm of a shampoo, the operation enlivened by the low toned chat that barbers the world over have invented to cheer the hapless occupants of their inquisitorial chairs.

The barber's questions had elicited the interesting information that the gentleman now under his soapy hands was a stranger to the city and was leaving almost immediately. Growing more confidential, the gentleman admitted that his departure was so timed that he would be away before the bank opened and foolishly extravagant purchases had depleted his assets.

Would his friend the barber come to his rescue, in a way that would leave a handsome profit for himself? He had a fifty guinea gold watch that he would sell for twenty-five pounds if he could get ready money.

Without casting a slur on a profession in its origin closely allied to the medical and, presumably not without its strict etiquette, it may be remarked that there are many members of this honorable guild in Australia, who add to their income by rendering to citizens certain services forbidden by law indeed, but appealing to every real lover of sport in a very sporting community, services not unremotely connected with the race-track. Under these circumstances Mr. Cochrane's request was not necessarily abrupt, but there is a ritual in these matters.

The barber tried not to laugh at the sug-

gestion that he could afford to own a two hundred and fifty dollar watch.

"I'm a nice one to buy watches, I am," he grinned. "I couldn't afford twen'y-five pounds for jewel'ry, bless yer innocence. My colonial! My ole watch corst me twen'y-five bob, an' that does me."

The shampoo had drawn to a reluctant close, and the shampooed drew the watch, shining in its new beauty, from his pocket.

"Here she is. Do you mean you couldn't dig up twenty-five for this, when I can show you how you can get near fifty for it? Why, I've just bought it for fifty, but I've got to get away."

The friendly barber grinned again.

"I just bet you've gotta git away, if you're willin' to sell fifty quid's worth for 'arf the money. No, thanks."

The implication was plain.

"Nothing like that at all. Here, here's a proof. I've just bought this from Sweet's next door but one, but I haven't the gall to take it back and look like a fool. I'm going to have a face massage now, and one of these boys can fix me, while you take this around to Sweet's. They won't identify the watch, but they'll name its value, and I'll stay here, so if there's anything wrong I'll be on deck to explain. Take it to the salesman at the counter opposite the door. Don't tell him anything. Just ask its value. Then you'll be satisfied."

The doubtful barber hesitated, looked at the dangling watch, and was lost.

"Well's no harm in askin', I suppose. You're not the first nutty one I've seen by a long shot, an' if you want to act the giddy Carnegie, I won't stop yer. The watch ain't mine, an' you're not likely to git away without it or the cash."

Doubtful fingers were slowly unfastening his white apron. A spasm of caution led him to whisper to his assistant behind the counter of the front shop.

"Keep an eye on ther dude with ther top hat. Don't let him git away till I git back."

Then he entered his big neighbor's, quickly located the watch salesman and broached his business.

"What's this 'ere ticker worth, boss?" he asked, handing it out.

"That? Let's see. How did you come by this?" Obsequiousness was not for this fellow laborer.

"Never mind that. I wanta know what it's worth."

"It's one of our fifty guinea watches,"

The salesman had the watch in his hand, and opened the case to examine the number, which he then compared with the number in a huge calf-bound register on the desk.

"Why, we've just sold this watch to-day. Where did you get it? Come, now," roughly, "this looks mighty fishy. We sell this watch half an hour ago and now you come in to know its value."

"What's that got to do with me? I don't know anything about that. Gimme the ticker."

The barber was reaching for it, but the salesman grabbed him.

"No, no you don't. You explain this to the manager. I'll get into touch with the purchaser and see what has happened."

"That's all fair and square, mister. You kin do that, quick an' lively, Mr. Smarty, for I left 'im at my shop. There's nothin' wrong about me, young feller. On'y this bloke, 'e come to me just now, wantin' to sell this fer twen'y-five pouns. 'E tole me 'twuz worth fifty an' I nipped in 'ere to see. He's waitin'."

With uncontrollable excitement, the little shopman hurried from behind the counter. His habitual suavity had been extinguished by fear.

"What's that?" he sputtered. "He tried to sell you that watch for twenty-five pounds? Good Heavens! He paid for it—Merciful Powers! He paid me by check. I can see it all. He's a shark, and his check's not worth a penny."

"So that was 'is game, was it?" The barber's tone was not free from admiration.

"Mr. Gaynor! Mr. Gaynor!" the little man was yelling, and the customers at the counters all over the shop turned in well-bred surprise at the excited tones, while the other salesmen caught the contagious fever.

Mr. Gaynor, dapper manager of the shop, hurried with little bird-like shufflings over to his perturbed subordinate.

"See here, sir," said the latter. "I've just learned that a man to whom I sold nearly eighty pounds worth of goods this afternoon, for which he paid twenty-five cash, giving his check for the rest, has tried to sell this watch for half value. He's in this man's shop now, and all we've got is a valueless check."

The manager cut in.

"He's at this man's shop, you say? Did he try to sell it to you?" turning to the barber.

"My oath, 'e did, sir, an' damn near 'e come to doin' it, too. On'y me savvy in comin' 'ere saved me." The barber took all the credit for the sagacity shown.

"Call a policeman," was the crisp order of Mr. Gaynor, a man whose first impulse was to act, and his next to discuss.

The functionary being duly brought, Mr. Gaynor, the salesman, and the barber all told their stories together.

The policeman held up a massive hand that blocked out all the shop behind it and said magisterially:

"Wan at a toime. Ye'll be wastin' mebbe vallyble minutes. Yez'll be the boss here, sorr. Whut's the thrubble now? Has this little divil been shwindlin' ye?" with an aggressive look at the barber.

"No, no. We've been windled by a fellow passing a valueless check," replied Mr. Gaynor. "He's being detained at this man's shop two doors off and I want him arrested, before he can get away."

"Thin sha-a-rp's the wurrud an' shmar'r-t's the action," said the policeman, turning abruptly and leading the way out, the surprised and somewhat scandalized customers hurriedly stepping out of his path.

A few moments later Mr. James Cochrane, glowing of face from the attentions of the masseur, looked up to see a procession of four, headed by the blue-clad Law, step over the threshold.

"That's the man," pointed out the barber and the salesman simultaneously.

"Am Oi to take 'im?" the Law asked, and Mr. Gaynor echoed, "Take him? I should think so. I give this man in charge for uttering a valueless check. The exact charge can be framed later at the station."

The cool voice of Mr. Cochrane broke into the discussion.

"Am I the object of this conference, gentlemen? Oh, thank you, my watch, I believe," closing a firm hand on the repeater still held by Gaynor.

"You rascal," shouted that outraged one. "Let go that watch."

"Sure you're not making a mistake? My name is James Cochrane and I purchased that watch from Sweet's not an hour ago."

"There's no mistake, my fine fellow. Come along, constable. Joe," to the assistant, "get a cab."

Joe left, and Cochrane looked from one to the other.

"This is very serious, sir," he said to Gaynor. "You must be sure of your posi-

tion. I suppose you realize what you're doing."

"Constable, isn't it your duty to warn this man that anything he says will be used against him?" Gaynor demanded hotly, turning his back on Cochrane with a fine scorn of the criminal classes.

Cochrane laughed.

"All right. I've warned you. Now take the consequences," he said. "I've an appointment at four o'clock this afternoon. I can just make it. Do I understand that I'm under arrest? Very good. If I'm not there I shall suffer a serious pecuniary loss. I shall know where to look for redress."

"Here, young felly, go aisy on thim long wurruds, fer Oi've got to raypoort on whut ye ses at th' toime av arrist, an' how th' hill can Oi folly thim 'pecumery lorsses' an' sich? Ye'd betther hould yer whisht, as Misther Gaynor ses."

The cab arrived and the party got into it and drove to the nearest police station, where a charge was preferred against Cochrane. Bail was unattainable, but Cochrane made his protest against arrest, averring that he had paid for the goods, and professing not to understand his treatment.

"Was the check dishonored at the bank?" he asked Gaynor.

"Dishonored! You cunning rascal. You didn't give us the check 'till after banking hours and well you calculated on the start that would give you!"

Cochrane explained the necessity for his keeping his appointment at four o'clock, which hour had now passed, and with many complaints bewailed his loss at missing it. Gaynor laughed, and it was with difficulty that Cochrane obtained permission to telephone to the Australia to ask if any message had come for him. He was told one had, and he thereupon directed them to forward it at once by special messenger to the police station.

The charge took some time to formulate, and the discussion into which Cochrane led Gaynor lasted until the letter arrived.

Cochrane tore it open excitedly, and having read the few lines inscribed thereon, passed it to Gaynor with the bitter words:

"There, that's your work, and by Heavens you'll pay for it."

Gaynor read the note, which was brief.

"DEAR SIR:

"Your option expired at four o'clock today. As you were aware, there were other

applicants for the property at enhanced rates, so that in default of your acceptance I have closed the deal elsewhere.

Yours faithfully,

THOMAS LUXTON."

For a moment Gaynor was assailed with doubts, then he rallied.

"So we weren't the only ones you were trying to take down, eh?" he sneered. "Lucky we were quick on the scent. Probably saved this Luxton as well as ourselves."

And with a reminder from the sergeant to be ready when required he departed with the little salesman, whose erect back more than compensated for its erstwhile suppleness in the service of this unmasked criminal.

The night passed slowly in the little cell in which Cochrane slept, but it was not so appreciably different from his Castlereagh street quarters as to cause damage otherwise than to the feelings of the prisoner.

In the morning, Cochrane asked that the consul general of the United States be sent for. That official could not come, but an understrapper did, and in the presence of the inspector and the sergeant, Cochrane disclosed the fact of his relationship to the great Edward Cochrane, the Shipping King of the Pacific Coast, and owner of several tramps in the Australian trade—a name to conjure with in the big shipping port of Sydney.

His story was simple. He had meant to close a deal in real estate at four o'clock, leave the city at five for a day or two to inspect some more property he had an eye on, and, finding himself in a town where he knew no one, after banking hours, with no loose money, he had, eccentrically perhaps, been willing to sacrifice a small sum to obtain command of sufficient funds to see him through his immediate business.

"Sounds thin," said the consular representative.

"Is thin," agreed the inspector, emphatically.

"The banks are open now and they'll find their mistake," announced Cochrane. "Will it be thin, then?"

The understrapper shook hands with the nephew of the shipping monarch, wished him luck, eyed him doubtfully, then fled back to make a bad report, and to guard other American interests. The inspector talked of Broadway night life, which he had once seen afar off in three visits to Maxim's,

Rector's and Shanley's. He reckoned himself after these experiences a very definite devil—almost a Broadway institution.

Cochrane waited.

He waited until a crestfallen Gaynor, accompanied by a noisy, would-be genial, assertive director, one Sloan, came to acknowledge with all apologies that the check had been duly met. Cochrane's manner was ominous, and the demeanor of the two merchants was not rendered more cheerful by the inspector's cheery remark, as he came out of his office.

"Mornin', Mr. Sloan, mornin'. Funny business, this! Mr. Cochrane is the nephew of Edward C. Cochrane, that owns the Iris and a dozen like her tradin' here. How in the world you got the idea you were being swindled beats me. Gosh, that's rich. Nephew of a man that could buy your concern up, and never know he'd given the check.

"Well, I suppose you considered you had good ground. Good-by, Mr. Cochrane. I'll be over your side some day and if you're there I'll be glad to have a trot round with you. Hit some of the high spots on Broadway, what?" And his portentous wink indicated a will to be wicked, which totally belied his innocent nature.

Cochrane bade him farewell, with a cordial invitation to come over and do his worst, and, turning to go, was met by the outstretched hand of Mr. Sloan, who laughed without merriment.

"Well, well, so we locked up Ted Cochrane's nephew, bless my heart and soul. There's a funny side to this," he laughed, with heavy, insincere geniality. "The boys'll never forget it. The joke'll be on us. And it's going to cost me a dinner, Mr. Cochrane, yes, the best dinner the city can give, with all the frills and fizz we can get," he concluded.

Cochrane eyed him.

"It's going to cost you more than a dinner, Mr. Sloan," he said solemnly.

"Now, don't be sore, Mr. Cochrane. Come round to the office and talk it over. Can't talk here. I've got something round there with a bite to it—the best lubricator for stiff feelings. Come on, my machine's at the door."

"Mr. Sloan, my lawyer will come round and test that lubricant. Did Mr. Gaynor here tell you of the business I've lost through his action? I've been shabbily treated and I'm going to get my own back.

I warned Mr. Gaynor in the most solemn way of the error he was permitting himself to fall into, but he persisted.

"If I was a poor man, and helpless, I would have to put up with the tyranny, and be glad to get off, but it happens I am not, and I will use every penny of my fortune to get even. In the States, if people jump without looking where they're going to land, they grin and bear it if they break things. You've got to learn that on this side."

"D'ye mean to tell me you're going to pull us for damages? Why, it's outrageous!" spluttered Sloan. "Damme, it's blackmail."

They were outside the door of the inspector's office.

"Did you hear that last remark, Mr. Inspector?" called Cochrane.

The inspector came to the door.

"Dangerous talk, gentlemen," he said. "I heard it, and my advice is to go away and talk things over quietly."

They went down to the street.

"Outrageous?" repeated Cochrane. "Any more so than false imprisonment, illegal arrest, and loss of money? I don't want to talk to you, Mr. Sloan, but my lawyer will be instructed to sue your company for five thousand pounds damages for their action, and you personally for the same amount for slander. With the inspector's evidence I rather think I have a case."

"Five thousand pounds! Look here, step into this car. Step in here and let us talk this over quietly without lawyers. I spoke in haste, and I'm ready to apologize. I was taken by surprise. We've made a mistake, or at least this fathead here has made a mistake," glaring at Gaynor, "and we're ready to do handsomely by you, but five thousand pounds!" Sloan's voice rose to an incredulous shriek.

"Very well, Mr. Sloan, I'll come, but without prejudice to my future actions."

They stepped into the car, and were whirled to George street. There, Gaynor dismissed, Cochrane and Sloan were soon in earnest consultation. Now and again raised voices penetrated the glass screen of the private office, but were immediately lowered again.

Sloan's arguments were first calm and firm, next heated, then tremulous, finally plaintive. Cochrane was uniformly quiet, uninterested, almost distraught.

"I won't. I'll fight you. It's fishy anyway. Why should you try to sell a fifty

guinea repeater for half its value?" protested Sloan.

"Why shouldn't I?" countered the imperturbable Cochrane. "It was mine, I think we're agreed. You haven't a leg to stand on, Mr. Sloan. The law won't let you arrest a customer simply because, after having agreed to accept his check, you grow nervous and think it won't be paid. If it isn't, you have your remedy. Call my act an eccentricity if you like. You're going to pay for your tyranny, and every penny of the money I get from you I am going to give away to a man who landed here a stranger, and within two days was victimized. So I am not thinking about myself. The money will really go in charity, but the point is that you will have to pay up."

"I'm not sure that we hadn't the power to protect ourselves—" began Sloan.

"Ah, I see you're getting on to legal ground, and really in many ways I think this had better be straightened out by lawyers."

"Sit down, Mr. Cochrane. Don't be so hasty," begged the agitated Sloan. "We don't want any blamed lawyers in this. It would cost us as much as we gave you in fees."

"To say nothing of the loss in reputation, Mr. Sloan," reminded Cochrane, sweetly.

"You're not serious about five thousand pounds, surely?" fenced Sloan. "Twenty-five thousand dollars in your money?"

"If I am forced to sue, yes, for, as you say, almost as much as I recovered would go in fees, but I could recoup much of that through my action of slander against you. Don't let us overlook that."

"But you are not holding that remark against me, surely? I have apologized."

"It depends on prompt settlement in the first case," retorted Cochrane to this. "Here is my offer. I've spent a night in a police cell, suffered serious pecuniary loss, which luckily I am in a position to overlook, and have suffered badly in mind. My lowest figure is two thousand and an apology from your board."

"I'll put the matter before them at their first meeting. I have no power to deal with such an important matter."

"In that case then, the interview can terminate and I shall institute ordinary proceedings as my inclination prompts me. After all this is a hole-and-corner way of dealing with the affair." Cochrane rose and reached for his hat.

Sloan, badgered and beset, thought of the consequences of the scandal and gave in.

"I'll take the responsibility," he said. "The apology will have to wait, but I'll give you a check now."

"Send out for notes, please, Mr. Sloan. I've grown to dislike dealing in checks in this country," said Cochrane, urbane and smiling.

A few minutes later he signed his name to a hastily drawn document absolving the firm of Sweet and Marlow, Limited, from all actions, claims, suits and demands whatsoever resulting from any action taken by them on the preceding day.

With a gentle farewell, the ill-treated Mr. Cochrane walked out of the office and the establishment. A spasm of unnecessary caution led him to a bank, where he changed the large notes to smaller denominations, and sped, with light heart, to his hotel.

A telephone message brought an impatient, anxious and curious Bunny post-haste to the hotel.

Once in his room, with the door locked, the smiling Cochrane faced Bunny, and inquired for his views on making a living in the straits to which they were reduced.

"What's happened?" quivered Bunny. "Why the rig? You've been spending all right."

He then launched out on the necessity of getting busy at once and cutting out luxuries, when Cochrane, with a roar of laughter said,

"Bunny, you'll be the death of me. Can all that stuff, my dear chap. Wallingford has come to Australia. Didn't I tell you to trust to your Uncle James? Get out of the way of the storm of prosperity. Look, Bunny, look, a blizzard of notes."

The astounded Bunny thereupon beheld a snowstorm of crisp English bank notes, ten pounders, whirling about him falling from the upflung arm of his friend, who, grinning delightedly, watched him stoop down and retrieve the wealth that had literally dropped on him from the air.

The next few minutes were occupied in counting them. Bunny's monotonous 'eight hundred and forty, eight hundred and fifty' seeming to him the sweetest music.

Then Cochrane told his story.

"The easiest thing that ever happened. Only needed the investment of a good suit of clothes of the proper cut. Marvelous how they trust you if you're wearing English-

made clothes. The jewelry was no risk: you can always realize on good stuff, and I buy no other.

"The only thing I regretted was the extraordinarily rotten excuse I had to put up, but it was necessary that it should be thin, or the barber would have bought the watch at once without inquiries. I had to make him suspicious, and of course, there had to be such strong certainty that the check was a bum one, or even a merchant would think before putting his head into the lion's mouth. However, all's well that ends well.

"Now we'll leave Sydney at once, and get going on something legitimate. Here's where I reform. Say, Bunny, this is the first time my uncle has really been useful to me. He was to-day, though. They thought I was the 'big noise', and that the

long arm of my dear relative was stretched out over me, holding a check-book. If they only knew!" he chuckled.

There was silence a minute. Then Bunny broke it.

"Is it the 'straight and narrow' for us from now on, Jim?" he asked.

"How do I know?" the other answered. "It's all in the hands of fate. I thought it was to be before, but you went and got jockeyed and that threw us off once more. I'll say this, though, son. We'll watch ourselves. You keep off the race-track and the tables, and I'll watch out for my particular tripping-block, an' we'll make it so blame hard for Fate to throw us that she'll get a grouch and quit. Is it a go?"

"Betcha life it's a go."

And the two gripped hands.

Bricks Without Straw



by Tudor Jenks

I.

SOMERS FALLS had some claim to be the literary center of an extensive territory. It was the home town of the Papyrus Club that met each month to spread sweetness and light, and to maintain the culture of its members.

Some enjoyed it, and the rest put up with it, consoling themselves with the refreshments, for you might as well be nobody in Somers Falls as not to belong to the Papyrus Club.

But where is the Eden without its serpent, and where does not the rivalry of brutal man for the love of beautiful woman breed strife, or give rise to plots, counterplots, and all the zest of the love drama?

In Somers Falls the beautiful woman was Madge Carpenter; the serpent was Mrs. Albert Ramsay; and the brutal man rôles were played by Jack Harding and Ralph Davidson—both in love with Madge.

Mrs. Ramsay was Ralph's aunt, and developed into the Serpent of Guile only after Jack had butted into the game. You see, Jack was from the wicked city—one of those horrid newspaper men. He came to Somers Falls on his vacation, and instead of taking a complete rest, as his physician had advised, he complicated his nervous condition by falling in love with pretty Madge from the very first time they ate ice-cream together on the Japanese-lantern lighted porch of her father's house.

Ralph considered that the city man was

poaching on his preserves. For hadn't Ralph finally decided on Madge after considerable dangling after several village belles? And wasn't it Ralph's sincere conviction that any girl in the place or within some miles of it would be glad to be the chosen bride of the son of its chief magistrate? He had, and it was, are the answers to these questions.

And so he considered Jack Harding an outlaw, and not entitled to the least mercy.

When he began to run into Jack at Madge's house, and could no longer pooh-pooh him as an unworthy rival (for Jack had a college-athlete record, and was handsome, as well as being endowed with what Ralph called "the gift of gab,") Ralph took a little trip to the city on inquiry bent.

This journey failed to reveal any unsound spots in young Harding's career. On the contrary, it threw a scare into the amateur detective, for he met only enthusiastic praise of handsome Jack, and assurances that he was "white all through, and sure to make good."

Ralph realized then that he had met a foeman worthy of his steel, and set about finding crevices in his rival's armor, or securing the services of something in the nature of a Fairy Godmother.

Naturally he sought Mrs. Albert Ramsay, his backer and adviser—the able and powerful president of the Papyrus Club. She had long advocated his choosing Madge, and was aroused to wrath when warned that this city hawk, Jack Harding, was hovering hungrily over this, the tenderest little country chicken of them all.

With a snap of her cold blue eyes she announced:

"This whipper-snapper must be crushed at once!"

Whereupon she and her nephew devised a scheme beautiful in its simplicity and based, as all such schemes should be, on the weak point of their victim.

Briefly, the plot was this:

At the very next meeting of the Papyrus Club she and Ralph were the members appointed to furnish the literary feature—which, according to custom, was not to be announced until the evening of the performance. They had decided to make the theme "Calderon, and His Influence." As was usual, Ralph would first "say a few words to the club" on this theme, and then Mrs. Ramsay would read selected passages from the works of the author.

Of course Madge would be there, for she was secretary—an office usually awarded to the prettiest and most popular young-lady member who was a good speller. Also of course (and Ralph ground his teeth with jealous rage) Jack Harding would be there as her escort, since Ralph had some time previously been turned down for that precise reason.

"Now," Mrs. Ramsay said, "you must arrange to be a little late that evening; come, say, at nine sharp. I will manage it so that when you do not appear I will call upon Harding to take your place."

"He will say he can't do it," objected Ralph gloomily.

"Not he!" Mrs. Ramsay insisted. "And if he does, why, so much the worse for him! I'll show him up as an ignoramus!"

"Well, when he begs off, what then?" Ralph demanded.

"Then you speak your piece in good style—and when Madge sees you going up like a rocket where he has just come down like a stick, she will see the difference between mere showy smartness and true culture! Trust me!"

The plot being thus perfected, the conspirators separated—Ralph to exhaust the town library on Calderon, and Mrs. Ramsay to practise gestures and expressions before her mirror, so that she might gracefully render the reading of the extracts from the more dramatic portions of the plays.

On the way back from the library, Ralph happened to meet Jack in the drug-store—where Jack was buying a large and fancy box of candy. Ralph strolled up casually, and after a moment's talk remarked:

"Oh, by the way, I have been trying to find out something about Pedro Calderon. What do you know about him?"

"Calderon? Seems to me I've heard the name somewhere, but blamed if I can tell where. Pedro Calderon—no. Try the telephone-book, and if he isn't there, call up 'Information.' That's what I'd do. So long!"

"Well, *that's* all right," said Ralph, chuckling as Jack departed.

II.

THE world turned over twice, the shades of evening descended on Somers Falls, and the members of the Papyrus Club (excepting Ralph) made their way to the Ramsay residence.

The worst record for the distance traveled was made by Miss Madge Carpenter and Mr. Jack Harding, whose progress was so very slow that one might have suspected that they were less interested in literature than in another subject with the same initial, but rhyming with "glove" and "dove."

In fact, they came to a complete stop for a minute or so near Deacon Hodge's high hedge, and had an earnest though short dialogue that ended thus:

"Say you *do!*—a little, Madge!"

"Oh, Jack!—you know I *do!*"

And then came a little soft chirp that made a sleepy Mother Robin think one of her nestlings had called her—but she was mistaken.

After a while the couple arrived—quite late; and every other girl noticed what a lovely color Madge had, and how bright Jack Harding's eyes were, and how very cheerful both seemed.

Little did poor Jack think, in this his hour of happiness, that he was the victim of a dastardly plot—which now, even now, was to be sprung on him, and was destined to reduce him to a state of embarrassed confusion, to make him the object of derision or of pity, as the case might be.

Madge read her report of the last meeting, and looked as sweet and pretty as possible while doing so. It was an unusually bright and amusing report, too, for Jack had "given it a few touches"—as, indeed, was only fair, since she had been deprived by him of much of her usual leisure. The report had been finished just in time—both working together (and very close together) over it late that afternoon.

The usual formalities followed, while Jack and Madge exchanged wireless messages by eye-power, innocently thinking that neither had any further part in the proceedings. Their brains were busy with rosy visions, and neither even noticed that "Calderon and His Influence" was the subject for the evening, being completely absorbed in "Cupid and *His* Influence."

But hark! Awake, ye lovers! Listen to the silvery voice of Mrs. Ramsay. What says Madam President?

"Owing to the unexplained absence of Mr. Ralph Davidson, who was to make the introductory discourse upon Calderon, I find that I must call upon some other member of the club to take his place. Luckily, we have with us to-night a gentleman to

whom literature is not, as with us poor amateurs, merely the pursuit of leisure hours, but a vocation. One of us might be excused for refusing the task, but it is one he must welcome as a faithful servant of the Muses. Equipped by years of study, armed *cap-à-pie*, ready for any service, it is to him we turn in our emergency, to the veteran soldier when one of the Home Guard fails us!

"I ask, therefore, that Mr. John Harding, forgetting self in the interest of the club, will sacrifice himself for the general good. Will you, Mr. Harding, be so kind as to make up for the inexcusable defection of Mr. Davidson? Let us have some little store of your learning on the subject of 'Calderon and His Influence.'"

For a moment Jack's brain went round. He felt as he had in college days when called after a hurried return from the football field to expound in the class-room some mathematical problem of which no notion existed in his curly brown head.

But here he could not answer, "Not prepared, professor!" That reference to Ralph; the glittering and satirical eyes of Madam President (in which he read malicious glee); the scared sympathy and indignation of Madge's sweet face, the applause of the audience—all aroused his fighting spirit. With a grin such as he used to wear on the rush-line, he turned after one breathless moment to the young girl who sat at his side—luckily she was a bright girl, and a sworn friend of Madge—and breathed the soft question in her ear:

"For the love of Mike, Dora, who is Calderon, anyhow?"

Dora supplied all the ammunition she had in the whispered answer:

"Big dramatist—Spanish—old-timer. I'm so sorry!"

Jack rose to his feet, bowed gracefully to the president and to the rest and spoke as follows (we are not sure that we give the complete speech, but the gist of it is here):

"Madam President and Fellow Members of the Papyrus Club:

"I am both flattered and fluttered by your trust in me, but without wasting your time to bespeak that indulgence which an emergency might claim, I shall do my humble best to fill, no matter how unworthily, the duty an accident has assigned me."

Encouraging applause gave Jack time to pull himself together. When it quieted he resumed with apparent confidence:

"I will ask you all to exchange, mentally, our bleaker and less genial climate for the soft seduction of sunny Spain—land of the mantilla, of the sweet notes of the guitar, of the deadly bullfight, where the bedizened toreador sports with death to win bright flashes from the dreamy eyes of dusky *señoritas*, where *hidalgos* and beggars, ragged aristocrats and gypsies alike cherish traditions of the splendors that once were Spain's—and that sank with the storm-wrecked glories of the Great Armada!"

Hearty applause interrupted him, and then Jack thought it time to get down to brass tacks—especially as he caught sight of Ralph gliding into a back seat, and wearing an expression of dismay.

"And amid such scenes, amid sunshine and shadow, in the old days, his genius all unsuspected, played the boy Calderon—Calderon whom some have audaciously named the Shakespeare of Spain. From such surroundings the bright and piercing eyes of that marvelous lad gathered the life-knowledge which his maturer years wove into the masterly triumphs of the playwright's art that to-day remain at once the absorbing study of scholars whose learned pages aspire to interpret his living lines."

Here Madge's face alight with loving admiration gave Jack fresh confidence, and he turned on more steam:

"For years this magician of the stage held his audiences spellbound. Laughter or tears he evoked at will. The greatest actors outdid themselves to depict the rich characters he created, and more than one owed fame to pronouncing the perfect phrases penned by this modest genius."

His attentive audience assured Jack that he had a clear field to his goal, and he therefore launched into a wholly fictitious sketch of Calderon's "Day of Triumph"—a birthday fête wherein flowers, girls, bull-fighters, music, cheers and a grand procession in the enormous Plaza del Toros were described with such plentiful and vague details as Jack's fertile brain could fake on the spur of the moment. Having thus covered a fair amount of time, Jack glided to his peroration.

"But this feeble prologue must not curtail the richer feast to follow. A word on the influence of the mighty poet, and I am done. The King of Dramatists tells us that the purpose of his art is to hold the mirror up to Nature. This test ranks Calderon with the Brotherhood of Shakespeare, Jon-

son, Fletcher, Marlowe—with Ibsen and Maeterlinck. Like these, he has taught mankind to know itself. From Calderon, Spain learned to know Spain in very truth. So was born national pride, an awakening to old ideals—a striving for them.

"As Cervantes laughed Spain's chivalry away, so Calderon inspired his race to reach ideals, to translate dreams into action, to make poetry truth. May we not then say that to Calderon Spain owes much of what she is to-day, of what she will become if her statesmen rise to the possibilities Calderon inspired Spain to see?

"Let us now reverently listen to some of the lines that have so long been household words to all who love Spain's romantic past, and the dreams of a great future for the race that won their land from the blight of the Crescent and restored it to the Cross of Christendom!"

With heartfelt joy that it was over, Jack bowed modestly to his applauding audience, and sank to his feet by friendly little Dora, bestowing upon her at the same time a delicious confidential wink that spoke volumes as he whispered:

"Well, Dorakins, did I kick a goal?"

And if Dora squeezed Jack's hand delightedly, even Madge would not have minded the little tribute of affectionate joy.

But Madge, who knew no more of the great Calderon than Jack did, glowed with wonder and pride in her hero—on whom deep learning sat so lightly; who exploded erudition at a mere touch; who yet deigned to love her; with whom—oh, joy!—she was to walk home when this meeting was over!

Mrs. Ramsay struggled through her reading somehow—though not in good form. Her voice was uncertain. She seemed confused at times; and once when she caught Ralph's accusing eye she lost her place and could not go on until she had sipped the glass of water that stood at her elbow.

The meeting adjourned at last, and Madge and Jack took the walk neither ever forgot. The deacon's high hedge again was a sheltering accomplice to several soft nothings and another "tweet, tweet, tweet" that again awoke poor tired Mother Robin; and before Jack left Madge she wore his ring—and had received his modest confession that all he knew of Calderon he owed to Dora's prompting whisper.

And he was twice as flustered during the wedding ceremony as he had been in telling the Papyrus Club all about Calderon.



The Log-Book

By the Editor

WERE you ever asked to name two or three people who could vouch for it that you were a perfectly respectable and reliable individual? And wasn't your mind for a minute or two a whirling blank as to whom to call upon? Even though you might count your friends by the legion. Consider, then, the situation if you were among strangers, with the exception of one person with whom you had gone to school years before and whom you had not seen since.

This is the predicament of *Beverly Wayne*, a beautiful girl, whose fate becomes

A MYSTERY OF ROSCOE CONKLING PARK

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS

the name and author of the highly dramatic book-length novel in the April ARGOSY. Mr. Hopkins was born in Utica, New York, and has laid the events of his story in that region, so he knows whereof he writes.

A wedding is just under the horizon—scheduled for 8 A.M., when the tale opens on the evening before. The wedding does not take place because something else does, still earlier that same morning—something in which *Miss Beverly Wayne* is very vitally concerned. No, she is not the prospective bride, nor is she a girl with whom the groom-to-be had previously been in love. The event which postpones the ceremony is a far more serious one than a contretemps like the latter would be—far more serious, that is, for *Beverly Wayne*.

The man who comes to her rescue is not the bridegroom, but a fellow who has known her less than twenty-four hours, and his act of gallantry serves only to implicate himself and involve the girl still deeper in the meshes of suspicion. What it means and how it all turns out, you can ascertain in the rapidly moving thirty-one chapters of "A Mystery of Roscoe Conkling Park," published complete in the April ARGOSY, which will also carry the opening of a new Two-Part Serial,

THE HEIR TO THREE MILLIONS

BY JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE

telling what happened to a young man in the butcher business on Eighth Avenue, New York, when he suddenly found himself not wholly undisputed master of an exclusive property in Massachusetts. It's a case where a man's past, and one which he has not made for himself, either, rises to smite him in the face. What *Tom Pender* does to the gang that strives to thrust it upon him is well worth reading about, and the story is told in Mr. Lawrence's happiest style.

An author who has not been represented in *THE ARGOSY* for many moons will reappear next month with an extra long short story of movie life.

"THE SMUGGLER'S DAUGHTER"—Five Reels

BY PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

is a fascinating turning inside out of motion picture experiences, about which Mr. Sheehan has now personal knowledge, having done several scenarios under contract. The arrogance of the female star and the trials of a movie director are set forth in graphic style.

In this same April *ARGOSY* you will also find a swinging Western tale by Howard Dwight Smiley, called "When the Sheriff Came for Bud"; also, "A Lady in Distress," by Rex Parson, a moving story of a motor experience wherein a young man who sought to do a kindly act got in bad.

But instead of mentioning further April attractions, I will turn at once to the mail-bag, and permit you readers to chat in and about *THE ARGOSY* in your wonted spirited vein.

HIS FIND IN A LOG-CABIN

Below is a picturesque account of the fashion in which one man made acquaintance with *THE ARGOSY*. These recitals are always interesting. Do you note, by the way, that of late correspondents have ceased to "knock" *THE ARGOSY*, and have taken to knocking the knockers instead? I have, so don't blame it on me for suppressing the kicks that don't materialize.

Courtland, Kansas.

The first copy of *THE ARGOSY* I ever read I found in a prospector's log-cabin in British Columbia, on the Kootenai River. "Pard" and I ran out of grub, and snow-shoed around looking for a cache and found it. But the best find was an *ARGOSY*. I got so interested in a story in it that I nearly forgot the flour and tea I had come for.

That was in January, 1895, twenty-one years ago, and I have never missed a copy since. What amuses me is to read in the Log-Book how so many say: "Cut this out. I don't like it." Or "I don't like So-and-So. His writings are rotten." What kind of a magazine would it be that would suit equally well, say, a dyspeptic and a big, full-faced, jolly fellow? There is enough in *THE ARGOSY* to amuse the whole human family, and all for ten cents. Why kick? For shame. A person that can build up a magazine like *THE ARGOSY* does not need very much advice on how to run it.

I like stories from the Canadian wilds or Alaska best; because I have lived so much up there out in God's open country.

C. J. ANDREN.

WOULDN'T MISS A COPY EVEN AT THIRTY CENTS A WEEK

Here's another enthusiastic admirer of our magazine. The reason Mr. Gregory finds *THE ARGOSY* stories as good as any written by authors with big reputations is because in *THE*

ARGOSY clever writers put forth their mightiest efforts to achieve this reputation. And I may add, I never buy poor stuff just because an author has a big name. In this magazine it is the goods in the package, and not the brand on the outside, that counts.

Lynn, Massachusetts.

I have read *THE ARGOSY* for a number of years—about nine in all—and I wouldn't be without it. I have read the likes and dislikes of your patrons, and it is very, very interesting, yet sometimes disgusting. Every single story is good, whatever it be. I never have read a bum story in *THE ARGOSY*—no, sir; no, not a one—and I have read every yarn published in that magazine beginning with February number, 1907, up to now. This very afternoon I have the January issue of 1916, better than ever, and have finished the first two stories, "Comrade Island" and "His Million Dollar Star."

Yes, indeed, I voice the sentiments in H. H. G. (Shorty's) letter (January Log). Let the fanatics rave, roar, and kick, but you can keep on with your magazine, reduce it in price, or put it up in price to as high as twenty-five cents, yes, and higher, and if it came as often as once a week at thirty cents I wouldn't miss a copy. That's what I think of *THE ARGOSY*.

I see one of the kickers says, "Cut out the serials." Bah! He don't like good stories, or he wouldn't say that. I notice a great many don't like Jackson. Well, he is a man who writes some classy love stories with a punch. Another says *Hawkins* stories are no good. Why, say, *Hawkins* tales are par excellence, and I certainly wish that we could have four times as much of both of the above.

Yes, every story ever published in *THE ARGOSY* is excellent. Why, I have read in it a story full of excitement and a funny story; also a calm, smoothly running yarn just as good as any Anna Katherine Green, Louis Tracy, George Barr McCutcheon, or Amelia Barr ever wrote, and they are all good, strong writers. Before 1916 goes out I am going to subscribe to *THE ARGOSY* for a period of three years.

WARREN A. GREGORY.

THE EDITOR DOESN'T GET OFF

My answer to the query put me in the letter below as to where I get off at in paying attention to the kicks is that I don't get off. In other words, I do not allow myself to be influenced by knocks. A glance at the contents of current ARGOSIES will testify to that.

Last summer and in the early autumn, the kickers used up much ink in protesting against serials when we were only running one. For some time past we have been carrying two without a protest, and with a constantly increasing circle of readers. Now, does my Baltimore friend still believe that the editor is a poor weakling? And certainly, seeing his own letter printed herewith, he cannot still regard the Log-Book as a fake.

508 West Fayette Street,
Baltimore, Maryland.

To begin with, I believe that the Log-Book is a fake, or else the editor is a poor weakling who hasn't enough spunk to run his own magazine.

Now I do not care whether you sign my name or not to this letter, as I am not looking for any free advertising. I am in the theatrical business, and for my part THE ARGOSY does not come often enough. I have read the book, and followed it through its raise in price and fall of same. I believe that most of the stories are all right.

Where do these kickers get off at? Mr. Manager, run your own magazine. Your success depends on the general public, not on one man. This poor, dried-up simp spends ten cents and dares to criticise the work of a man who, like yourself, has spent a lifetime catering to the general public at large. Where do you get off at to listen to such as he? Show me the man that can please everybody, and I will put up a monument to him.

I read your ARGOSY while in Australia, New Zealand, England, France, Afghanistan, Johannesburg, Buenos Aires, Havana, Jamaica, and I have admired all the writers' work.

LES FRIMINI.

THE ARGOSY'S HALLMARK

In renewing his subscription, a reader in the land of the pyramids adds the following pleasant words regarding THE ARGOSY. My constant endeavor is to get out of the rut of conventionality, so Mr. Jessop's sizing up of the magazine's hallmark as standing for the new and novel is doubly appreciated.

Alexandria, Egypt.

I see a lot of chatter in your Log-Book about good and bad stories, but as I have only found good stories in your magazine I've nothing to say. Out here especially your publication is a godsend, and I think I may say with safety that I get more pleasure from its contents than from those of any other printed production, as your hallmark is originality.

A. W. JESSOP.

SAVED EVERY NUMBER FOR TWELVE YEARS

THE ARGOSY threw off its knickerbockers (Mr. Munsey's felicitous phrase to denote the passing

of the publication from the juvenile to the grown-up class) with the issue for January, 1896. In October of the same year it became the first all-fiction magazine in the world. This reminiscence is evoked by Mr. Park's letter. "The Boy Broker," by Mr. Munsey, and "Dick Broadhead," by P. T. Barnum, appeared as ARGOSY serials in 1887 and 1888, respectively.

Portland, Oregon.

I have never written you before, and I hope this will escape the waste-basket. I first saw your publication about thirty years ago, when it was published in small newspaper form. I have been nearly a continuous reader since that time. I was interested in the boys' stories particularly, and will give you the titles of two of them, and by that you can likely let me know what year they were printed. They are "Dick Broadhead" and "The Boy Broker," and I would like to see them in print again.

At one time I had saved every number of THE ARGOSY for twelve years in succession, and you can judge if I enjoyed reading them or not, as I read them over the second time after a few years had elapsed. I like nearly all the stories, but never miss *Hawkins* very much. I like stories of adventure, shipwreck, islands, *et cetera*. "The Heart of Virginia Keep" and "Too Terrible for War," and many others, were very good, I think.

A friend of the best magazine made—THE ARGOSY.

E. D. PARK.

STRONG FOR SERIALS

Note what happens if a reader drops THE ARGOSY for a year. Mr. Thompson, who sends a year's subscription with his letter, will be happy at finding the serials back.

Rhoadesville, Virginia.

I have been without THE ARGOSY one year, and certainly have missed it. It never had the same charm for me since the kickers kicked the continued stories out of it. I hope you have put them back, as it was better with them.

GEORGE O. THOMPSON.

HIS FULL SHARE FOR THE MONEY

"The Man With the 44 Chest" was printed as the full book-length novel in THE ARGOSY for October, 1914, and Mr. Moon, writing the day before Christmas, 1915, still finds it standing out in his memory as the best ever. Some compliment that!

Springfield, Tennessee.

This is the first I have ever written for this magazine, but I read and value it highly. As to your Log-Book, I read that about first of all and enjoy it no little. There are some of THE ARGOSY stories, I think, better than others, yet the very ones I think best may be thought worse by ten thousand others, or *vice versa*; so why should I grumble?

Of all the stories I have read in THE ARGOSY or any other magazine, "The Man With the 44 Chest" came nearer touching my literary conscience. Had I not liked any other in the ten years I have been reading this magazine, I would think I had my full share for the money and be contented.

IRA J. MOON.

HOW MANY NOTICE AUTHORS' NAMES?

Anybody agree with the undersigned as to the bloodthirstiness of H. Bedford-Jones's stories? While on this subject, by the way, I should like to hear from readers who never think of noting the name of the author of a story. I am wondering whether there are many such. Possibly if there are, they are the very ones who never read the Log-Book, and hence would not see this request.

Denver, Colorado.

Have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for several months, and find it the most entertaining magazine of its kind on the market to-day. William MacLeod Raine is my favorite author, and I hope his stories appear at regular intervals in THE ARGOSY. I also like Fred Jackson, and cannot see why people kick about his stories. H. Bedford-Jones is a good writer, but his stories are just a little too bloody for me.

H. F. TARVIN.

GLAD HE IS NOT AMONG THE KNOCKERS

The knockers continue to be assaulted more than the stories. I am leaving out Mr. Roux's verses and his remarks about the unseen voice in stories as being rather too deep for the average reader. I appreciate his letter none the less.

New Orleans, Louisiana.

I read various magazines, but my preference is for THE ARGOSY and its staff of writers. I am partial to the full book-length novel. I also like the short stories, and always go through the Log-Book and watch the knockers; must say I am glad to know I am not among them.

Say, brothers, put away your hammers and stop knocking. It seems that Fred Jackson and Bedford-Jones get the largest share of the knocks; I like them both, because each has a style of his own. Jackson's "Red Robin" was a masterpiece.

JOHN L. ROUX.

ANTICIPATING THE DOUBTERS

Really, it seems almost beyond belief that there are still readers who believe that the letters printed in the Log-Book are manufactured out of whole cloth, just as if they were pure fiction, such as fills the body of the magazine. I dare say there will be more of these Doubting Thomases than ever now, with so few roasts appearing, for I have about concluded that the impression of fake must arise from the many compliments we print. Anticipating this, I am herewith giving you another attestation, in addition to those I have printed from time to time, as to the authenticity of the communications appearing in this department.

Wilson, Arkansas.

It has been over a year since writing, and would not do so now, but I want to let you know that a lady from Tennessee, in looking over some old ARGOSIES, saw in the October, 1913, number the letter I wrote you. She wrote me asking if it

wasn't a *fake* to write her and let her know, as she thinks the letters in the Log-Book were merely *fakes*. I am writing her to-night to let her know that my letter was "no fake," and did not believe that any letters you publish were fakes. I will furnish you her name and address if wanted.

I again wish to thank you for the stories you are giving us to read. They cannot be beat. I've been a reader since 1905, and haven't missed a single copy. Miss Eggleston is certainly a dandy writer, and, in fact, all of your authors are A1. All I've got to say further is "Buy THE ARGOSY if you want good, clean stories, and accept *no substitute*."

PAUL S. MEACHAM.

HANDING IT TO THE EDITOR

Don't get discouraged if you don't see your letter printed in the Log-Book a month or two or three after you write it. Remember that on account of its big circulation, THE ARGOSY must go to press several weeks ahead of issue day. Once in a while a communication that just fits a space may appear soon after it is written; again, as is the case with the favor of our friend Hill, many months go by before it reaches the printing-press. Then, of course, there are some letters that do not make the Log-Book at all.

But I do not wish any of my correspondents to grow discouraged on this account. Perhaps the next letter they send in will prove to be the very thing I am looking for to hold the attention of our big audience. For, you know, that is the excuse of the Log-Book's existence—that what it contains shall be of interest, not to me primarily, but to the big majority of purchasers who make up THE ARGOSY's crew.

Shamrock, Texas.

I have been a constant reader of THE ARGOSY and the ALL-STORY for a good many months. We get good stuff in every publication of each. But what holds its interest for me most is the Log-Book. Some people criticise some of the stories, and some rave because there are too many serial stories, but I do want to say, Mr. Editor, that we have got to hand it to you for using good judgment in getting the kind of stuff that satisfies some of us all of the time and all of us some of the time. The poor nuts that criticise some of THE ARGOSY's stories never stop to think that you are doing your best.

GUY HILL.

GREW UP WITH THE ARGOSY

Did you ever try giving yourself a Christmas present? It can be done. This is the way one man worked it, as explained in a letter written the day before Christmas. The "golden" was dropped from THE ARGOSY's title in December, 1888.

Union Star, Missouri.

Please find enclosed check for one dollar, for which send me THE ARGOSY for one year. Have been buying it at the news-stand for some time, but thought I would make myself a Christmas present for the whole year. When I was a boy I took THE GOLDEN ARGOSY; think it has been getting better all the time. It certainly is the magazine among magazines.

W. E. ROBINSON.

DOESN'T SEE WHY ANY NEED KICK

I have just purchased a story that I am certain will reconcile Mrs. Wilhelm to the loss of Fred Jackson, now wholly absorbed in writing plays, as I explained in the September Log. It is called "From Dusk to Dark," and the date of its publication will be announced in due course.

Lebanon, Kansas.

We think, my husband and I, that *THE ARGOSY* is the best ever. Must we lose Fred Jackson's good stories? "The Diamond Necklace" was fine. Just keep on giving us as good stories as you have in the past and I don't see why any one need to kick. Give us more stories like "The Man With the 44 Chest," "Taming Fierce Elton," and "Winged Feet."

MRS. H. J. WILHELM.

PICKING FOR THE MAJORITY

I wonder if you readers ever think that possibly your editor may have his personal tastes and preferences in stories. But if he allowed these to sway him in deciding on the contents of each number, how long do you suppose the circulation would be maintained at its high notch figure? Having said this much, you may perhaps realize why the subjoined struck a responsive chord in my breast.

Bowling Green, Kentucky.

I have been an enthusiastic reader of *THE ARGOSY* for several years, and place it at the pinnacle in magazine editions. It contains some stories that I do not like; neither do I like the late installation of serials; but at that I get more than my money's worth, and more than I could by investing in any other reading matter.

Some of the knockers in the Log-Book make me tired and leave me under the impression that they are a selfish lot and desire *THE ARGOSY* constructed along lines to suit their own personal ideas and pleasures, with either no care or knowledge of the widely varying opinions and tastes of the many readers of *THE ARGOSY*. I do not like Oriental or sea stories; but why should I want to deprive the many other readers of them when I get more than my money's worth out of the remainder of the contents? Also, if the person who objects to your forecasting the contents of the next issue thinks that not doing so would add zest to the expectancy, why does he read your comments?

Considering *THE ARGOSY* "head and ears" above any all-fiction magazine published, I am,
G. H. M.

LOG-BOOK JOTTINGS

R. W. E., Centerville, Oregon, is asked to write a regular letter, stating what stories he has liked best. I should be glad to print this instead of the semi-acrostic he sends, which would take up too much space. I appreciate his compliment to *THE ARGOSY* just the same and hope to hear from him. James H. Ponnay, Portland, Oregon, is sure to be daffy over "From Dusk to Dark." He says he dotes on mystery stories, and the one I have mentioned has mystery in it of the

deepest dye. G. and A. Smaellie, Canterbury, Australia, consider twenty cents a number a small price to pay in that far-off land for the splendid complete novels *THE ARGOSY* gives them. J. S. Chitwood, Richmond, Virginia, believes *THE ARGOSY* to be the best magazine published, and among his favorite authors mentions Zane Grey, H. Bedford-Jones, and Frank Condon. He does not care for *Tarzan*, *Semi Dual*, or *Hawkins* stories on the ground of improbability.

E. L. R. Hansen, San Antonio, Texas, has read *THE ARGOSY* since 1908, and wishes to enter a protest against Fred Jackson quitting. He regards him as one of the best authors that have contributed to the magazine. C. W. B., Thayer, Missouri, sends in what he supposes is the first letter we have had from the Ozark Mountains, but assures me that *THE ARGOSY* has many loyal friends in his section. D. H. Holcomb, Meriden, Connecticut, has been a reader of *THE ARGOSY* for thirty years, and has never yet been disappointed in it. Doesn't want to miss any chapters of the serials, "as they are too interesting to lose." Earl Gibson, McCauley, Texas, notices that Jackson is the most abused of all our authors, but can't find any fault with him. Thinks his best stories were "Winged Feet" and "The Marriage Auction," and has also a high opinion of "The Diamond Necklace." Dow P. Conover has read *THE ARGOSY* for two years, and thinks it can't be beaten. The authors he likes best are Fred Jackson, H. Bedford-Jones, and Zane Grey.

Corinne E. Lillibridge regards the Log-Book as the personal note forming the link between the story-teller and the readers. O. Howe Modeste, Patton, Pennsylvania (real name enclosed), tells me that every change we have made has been an improvement, and although he prefers book-lengths, agrees that Zane Grey's "Desert Crucible" was best as a five-part serial. Hyda Teague, Anniston, Alabama, a college girl, admits that there is one day in the month when she does not study, and that is the day *THE ARGOSY* comes out. She says the full book-length novels are the best, and especially singles out for mention "The Marriage Auction," "The Alverdon Enigma," and "Red Robin."

Thomas M. Nave, Second Infantry, Company B., Honolulu, Hawaii, heartily approves of the short stories in *THE ARGOSY*. He will, I am sure, be particularly interested in a serial I am now getting ready to start in May, as part of the action takes place in the islands where he is stationed. Guy Erickson, Dwyer, Wyoming, writes that he is a homesteader, and finds *THE ARGOSY* a very essential item. W. K. Egner, Wayne, Pennsylvania, started taking *THE ARGOSY* five years ago, and writes that the family has spent many an enjoyable evening listening while one member read it aloud. George McRoberts, Mount Morris, Illinois, suggests that some one would better start a magazine for the benefit of the cranks and grouches, and "put only children's lullabies and tea-table stories in it."

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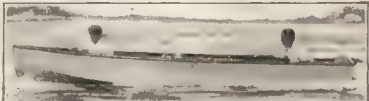
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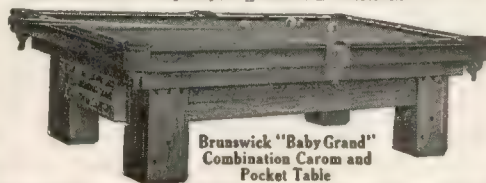
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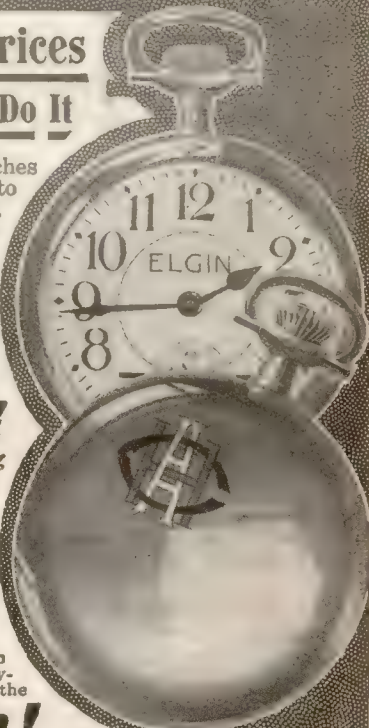
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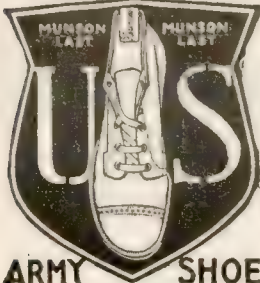
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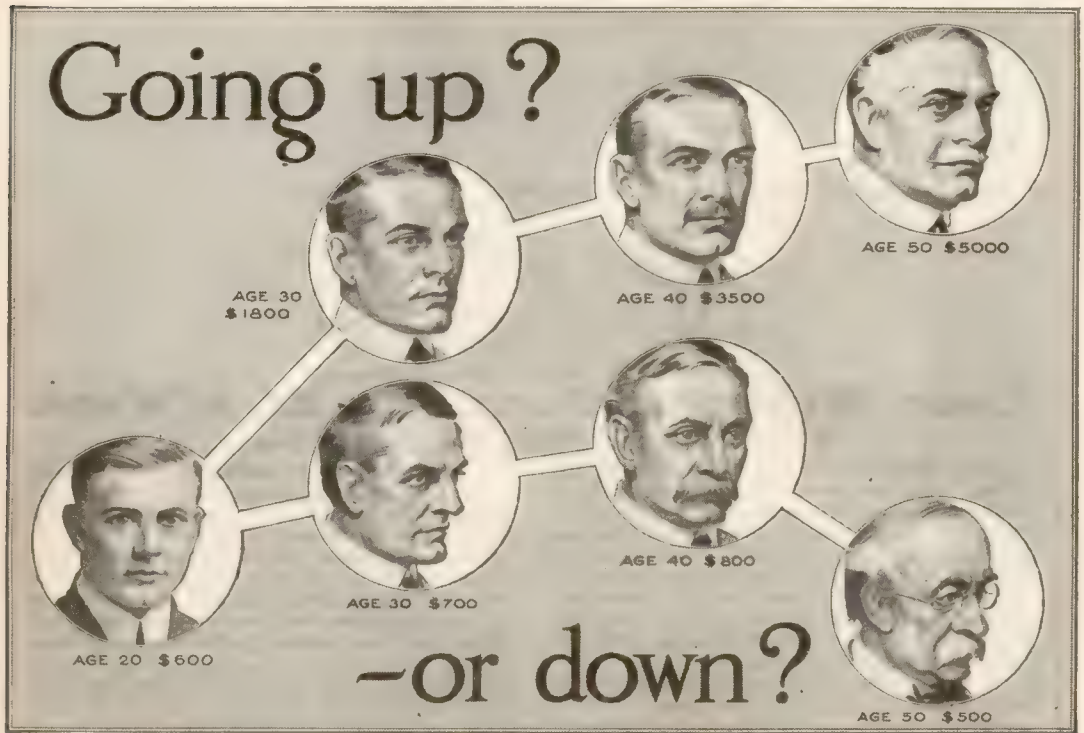
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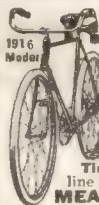
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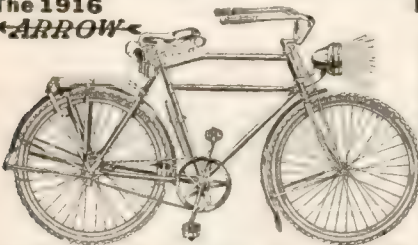
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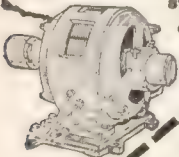
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